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IN A RASH MOMENT.

VOL. II.

IN A RASH MOMENT.

BY

JESSIE McLAREN.

“ For the heart must break, ere it grows a soul.”

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



London :

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,
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IN A RASH MOMENT.

CHAPTER I.

A PROPOSAL.

“ And now that the want and the wandering are past,
’Tis but like the winter, comes summer at last.”

I SUPPOSE it is true that marriage, like hanging, goes by destiny.

When, half an hour since, five minutes after two carriages full of church-goers quitted Heatherton, I entered the library, where Mr. Beatoun was waiting by appointment, to discuss my affairs, I had as much idea of cutting my nose off, as of marrying him, yet we are engaged.

VOL. II.

B

By rights, I ought to be in a delicious twitter, though the fact is, I am as cool as a cucumber. Affection has no place in the transaction, which is as complete a marriage of convenience, as ever was arranged in a Parisian salon.

I do not care three straws for the man I shall in a few weeks swear fidelity to, at God's altar, nor, unless I am greatly mistaken, is his affection for me much deeper.

Let me do him the justice to confess, I do not believe he would have proposed, if I had not all but offered myself, or rather cash, for his acceptance.

It came about quite unexpectedly. I mentioned the extreme perplexity I was in, where to seek a home, and he said he should be glad if I could *make* one, by becoming his wife—*Voilà tout !* Not much romance to shake one's nerves, or rush the colour to one's cheeks.

I am thankful he has no love for me ! I should hate him if he had.

He requires money, and I shall be a good hum-drum domestic wife, for the few years I hope to live.

If poor Mrs. Frazer's ghost had not scared me, I should have infinitely preferred death by charcoal at Neider Baden, but that being out of the question, marrying Pat is the only resource I can think of, without applying to Horace, which I should have to do, after to-morrow, when the advocate goes.

Heart-unions, they say, are sometimes evolved from chaos, as God made the world ; if so, my husband and I have a chance of ending our career, as Darby and Joan ; but the immediate comfort of the whole thing is, that I feel protected, and can defy the Morrisons or anybody else, to say or hint a word to my discredit.

It is a mercy Pat departs at nine to-morrow morning. If he stayed longer, he might think himself bound to loverize me, and I could not stand that. I trust when we are married, he will stick to his books, and leave me to my own devices. Above all, he must *never, never* speak evil of my guardian, never mention him at all in fact, and my daily prayer shall be, that since my lot is cast in Edinburgh, Horace and his wife, may have left it for ever, before my return.

Pat is not, and never can be, my elective affinity, as Horace was, but under certain conditions, I don't see why we should not jog-trot through life, amicably enough.

I suspect few of the married couples one meets are hes and shes who preferred each other to all creation, but as often as not, it is a case of two *pis-allers* collared together.

CHAPTER II.

A BRIDE.

HEIGHO ! it is a fine thing to be a bride, at least, in Heatherton House, where the fact white-washes your social blackness, rectifies your "moral obliquity" and makes you the drawing-room pet, instead of a dog with a tin tied to its tail.

Having resolved to swallow our pill, Mr. Beatoun and I do not intend putting off about it, so we are to be married this day four weeks, by Annie Morrison's tame parson.

Our first residence is to be furnished lodgings. It was Pat's proposal, but I gladly

seconded the motion, because, remembering how "*hard up*" Mrs. Frazer said he was, it strikes me he will look rather *blue*, when he finds his bride's current half-year's income, invested, per advance, in the sapphire ring he seemed to admire so much, on the finger of his boyhood's friend, five days ago.

Ah, me! that happy birthday dinner, when he wore it! How little did I imagine, grief was ready, like Jonah's whale, to swallow me up, flounder through the deepest depths, and at length disgorge me into the howling wilderness of matrimony with a briefless advocate.

Faute de mieux, the Morrisons are to be my bridesmaids, and their father is to give me away. Since I *must* be formally made over to Mr. Beatoun, I wish poor papa were alive to do it. If he could come back again, I think we should get on admirably to-

gether, and rub noses over our broken hearts.

There never was any reason for putting me in social quarantine, but it is certainly a comfort to be let out, and I cannot help feeling grateful to Pat, as the unconscious means.

I suppose, however, there is a "but" to most things in this world, and now that my poor little Bohemianism is over and done with, I am free to confess, it is ever so much livelier coquetting with other people's fiancés, than being saddled with one of your own.

Mine is not exactly prosy, but so perseveringly prosaic, that I fear constant association with him, will sink me to the oystery-emotional level of my intended bridesmaids.

He says I ought at once to write, and inform my guardian of our engagement.

My very heart and flesh cry out, against

what instinct tells me is cruelty; but I suppose it is necessary. How will Horace receive the news? With sudden pallor in his face because of me? and "Et tu, Brute," in his heart because of Pat? *Qui sait!* men are mysteries.

Thank goodness! the said Brutus leaves Heatherton to-morrow morning, and my only hope is, that he may not take it into his head to kiss me at parting.

My effervescent days are past.

I shall try my best to be a dutiful wife, but one must draw the line somewhere, and I draw mine, at kissing Mr. Beatoun or being kissed by him.

CHAPTER III.

“THY SMILE HAUNTS ME YET.”

“Yea, therefore, as a flint I set my face.”

“DEUCED clever fellow!” says The Mac-Struan.

“Such a very nice man!” remarks Miss Annie Morrison, smirking to me.

“So dignified!” echoes Miss Etta.

“So thorough-bred-looking!” puts in the old lady who resembles a white pussy cat, and whose name, by a curious coincidence, is Mrs. Purling.

They fancy they are ovating me, by puffing the advocate, who has just left for Edinburgh.

Their laudations are considerably overdone, but, to give the devil his due, my betrothed is a man to command respect, if not love; indeed now that he is absent, I really feel quite fond of him, and am unspeakably thankful he never made the slightest attempt to embrace me.

He comes to Heatherton for a few days, betwixt now and the wedding, and meantime we are to correspond, so as, if possible, to discover by induction, what sort of pig-in-a-poke we are severally about to invest in.

He is also to send me his photo, for fear I should forget precisely what he is like, a by no means impossible contingency.

Some faces, seen once, remain for ever fixed in memory, easy to recall at any moment, others speedily fade away in patches, so that after a week's separation, it is quite im-

possible to remember all their features at once.

By shutting my eyes now, I can see Horace as handsome as life. Since that moment when the light fell on him, at the salon door at Baden, there has not been a moment when, had I been an artist, I could not have painted him from recollection, with a vividness, which at this moment is keen pain.

It has always been the reverse as regards Pat; his face seemed a surprise the night he came here, and although it is not quite fifteen minutes since he quitted, I could not at this moment, to save my life, drag sufficient of him before my mind's eye, to form a portrait.

He carries my letter to Horace. I tore up eleven copies before making the final one, yet it is not a very lengthy affair after all.

DEAR MR. FRAZER,—There is no need to tell you how I mourn your darling mother's death, which leaves me without a single true friend, in this cold world. The only consolation is, that one so good and loving, is gone to that happier country, where the distracting mysteries of this present 'now' are satisfactorily cleared up, and broken hearts mended for evermore.

"I am to be married to Mr. Beatoun on the 29th inst.

"As my trustee, will you please make what arrangements you see fit with him? Could you kindly let me have 20*l.* to buy a white gown? It is literally all I require, as I shall continue at least two years in mourning.

"Even had my father's death not rendered this suitable, I should have worn as deep black, and for the same length of time, in memory of dear Mrs. Frazer.



“THY SMILE HAUNTS ME YET.” 13

“Mr., Mrs., and the Missess Morrison beg
to offer their sincere sympathy and regards.

“Believe me,

“Yours most truly,

“ROBERTA GATHORNE.”

I am not satisfied with my letter. How
can I be, when I fear, that for all that has
come and gone, it is perhaps spreading a
healing plaster over a wound filled with
proud flesh?

CHAPTER IV.

DREAM-WORLD.

MY head aches confusedly, and I have what Catalani used to describe as a "leetle kittling at di breast, and a great horse at di trot."

The doctor says, it is merely a feverish cold, but orders me to keep my bed for a day or two.

There is to be a large dinner party here this evening, and a ball to-morrow, but I am glad to be spared the necessity of being present.

The Morrisons make believe to be sorry I can neither dine nor dance in society, but

to my own amazement, I find I do not regret the deprivation in the least.

I live in a separate little dream-world of my own, founded upon the bitter-sweet possibility, that Horace may not find it convenient to leave Edinburgh; although I, in one sense, pray for it.

Should he still reside there, my husband, for old friendship's sake, will be sure often to ask him (not his wife, of course) to our home; and with this as a stand-point, I spend hour after hour in rehearsing "romantically awkward" situations *à deux*, till my head is so full of my guardian, there is but scant accommodation for the advocate.

I long immensely for the arrival of his promised photo, because no more than formerly can I recall his features; and it is very uncomfortable, not to be able to figure to yourself the face of the man you are to be yoked to for life, in three weeks.

Horace has forwarded the 20/. I asked for, enclosed in a kind, rather melancholy note.

From the depressed tone of it, I infer he does not find his wife much of a consolation for the loss of his mother, but of course he had no right to expect it. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

I have heard twice from Pat, who has the knack of writing the driest, matter-of-factest letters it ever entered into the mind of man to conceive.

However, I quite sympathize with him. Nobody who has not tried can tell the difficulty of putting down in black and white "love-dovey" sensations you do not feel an atom of.

To get up a Valentine, *pure and simple*, is comparatively easy, but at present, the Valentine style would neither suit him nor me, so we out-prose M. Jourdain, and I, at least, am conscious of the fact.

CHAPTER V.

COALS OF FIRE.

BRILLIANT, frosty day. A sunbeam lying across the foot of my bed lights up the scarlets, and greens, and purples, of the tartan silk coverlet.

I am expecting Dr. Munro, the medical man who attends me.

He is between fifty and sixty, but a bachelor and remarkably handsome, so I have taken some pains with my appearance, done my hair nicely, and pinned up a huge night-cap Mrs. Morrison lent me, into a becoming little Dolly Varden the size of an egg-cup. Night-

caps are antediluvian institutions I do not patronize, so when the doctor ordered me to cover my head, I had to borrow this guy of a thing.

Here comes its lawful owner with the said *Æsculapius* in tow, and opens her eyes at the Frenchified crown-piece into which I have transformed her sleeping turban.


"Slightly feverish," says "Medicus," after studying my shot-out tongue, and feeling my pulse. "She must remain in bed, and take the mixture every three hours."

"There's no danger, I trust!" exclaims Mrs. Morrison, thinking, no doubt, how disgusting it will be, if I die when she has two large parties on hand.

"No danger at all, madam, but I should like to see her again to-night."

"Thank you, doctor, pray do."

I have as much need of a second visit, as



a cart has of three wheels, and he is reported not at all greedy about fees; but Love goes where he is sent, and the spruce old country surgeon has lost his heart. That's it.

No man in love is altogether sane, but for an overdriven parish doctor to ride four miles on a winter night, to order a basin of gruel for a young woman with large liquid black eyes, who would not lift him with the tongs, is a very sad case of lunacy indeed.

Another time I might have amused myself with his folly, just to help away the hours; but at present I am too occupied "thinking forward" to Edinburgh, to have leisure for such nonsense.

"My dear," says Mrs. Morrison, coming back in about ten minutes, "my husband has just had a letter from your cousin, requesting him, with your consent, to act as your trustee in his stead, as he is going abroad

immediately ; but of course you know all about it. Mr. Morrison says he shall be happy to serve you every way in his power. It is surely a very sudden step of Mr. Frazer's ! I thought he was to be licensed as a Minister in February or March ? but, poor fellow, his mother's death has, no doubt, been a sad blow to him ! I never saw a mother and son so happy together in my life. We are very sorry he can't come to us even for a day, as he says there are so many business matters to settle before he leaves Scotland.— How lucky it is, my dear, that your marriage was fixed in the very nick of time ; I hope you will not find it very dull up here by yourself. We are so sorry you can't join our party ; there are some people coming I feel sure you would like, but Providence arranges for us far better than we ourselves could do."

When she goes, I weep tears of hot anger

at the Providence she admires so much, but which has evidently a spite at me.

Here was I, growing quite resigned to the wearisomeness of being Pat's wife if Horace remained in Edinburgh; and now he is leaving, not only it, but England; I must say it is too bad (of Providence) not him, poor fellow! for of course he wants to hide that hideous wife of his somewhere abroad.

I hope dear Mrs. Frazer died in ignorance of the charming daughter-in-law her only son had provided her with.

I wonder if Pat knows about her? I'm sure I shall never mention it. How would Horace feel if he knew I was behind the door that night, and heard him ask his wife to walk away with him?

The news of his proposed departure from Edinburgh puts an end to the highly-coloured mental novelettes which have filled

my brain the last few days, and which realized would have made my married life sweeter and spicier than it can possibly be now. Indeed, the future seems such a dreary blank, I do not quite see my way to go on with the wedding.

Yet, what else can I do ?

Suicide was always a card in reserve, but of course that ghost must needs appear to make me nervous about taking my own life. Yes, I fear I have no choice but become Mrs. Pat, although it is a pity my white satin dress is ordered, for I shall not have spirit enough to care whether I look well or ill.

How selfish it is of the Morrisons and Mrs. Murray leaving me here alone ! It is so awfully dull, now that I have nothing to look forward to or hope for. I wish something would happen to give me a fillip, and am rather

glad, as matters have turned out, that that old fool of a doctor is coming.

About three o'clock, as it is still snowing, all the ladies invite themselves to afternoon-tea in my room, which helps to pass an hour, but they retire as the short daylight is closing, and I yawn till my jaws ache.

By-and-by, when the servant comes to light the candles and clear away the cups and saucers, she says, with a sort of apologetic whine,—

“Oh, miss, I'm so awful sorry ; but here is a letter master gave me for you this morning, and I put it in my pocket intending to bring it up directly, and clean forgot all about it. Please don't tell missis, ma'am, she'll be fit to skin me alive.”

It is from Horace ; not a long letter, but, like the former one, steeped in sadness.

First come details of what Mr. Morrison

has to do for me, and the form in which I must agree to the change of trustees.

The items are quite easily grasped, but one of them rushes through me like strong wine, for, without acknowledging it to myself, all my thoughts since Pat left have been undercurrented by a sort of craven terror of what he would think when he found my half year's income already spent at the beginning of the six months.

The sentence in my guardian's letter which makes me exclaim "Thank God!" is this.

"Mr. Morrison will find your cash exactly as left by your late father, so that you have 185*l.* 15*s.* at your disposal for the current half year."

My relief is so great that, with my heart throbbing till it nearly chokes me, I kiss the paper again and again, before turning to the next page, where, through tears that fall as

if each were a drop of my life's blood, I read,—

“You will receive by express a box containing a few articles of which I beg your acceptance in remembrance of my dear mother, and as a wedding present to yourself and Patrick. I sincerely pray that God may bless your union and give you both long life and happiness.”

Words cannot express what I feel, but the beating of my heart is so physically painful that I am forced to concentrate my attention on it.

In a minute or two up comes Nancy again, bent on showing alertness in my service, to make up for her morning's mistake.

“Please, ma'am,” she cries, quite excited, “there's a big box come for you, will you have it up here? The rest o' the servants is

all busy, as there's company coming, but I could easily get the under-gardener to give me a help with it, he's just comed in with some flowers for the table."

"Yes, yes, by all means bring it here please."

Presently "Haighs," and "Hochs," and "Houghs" are heard on the stairs, and enter my recent partner at the ball and the indefatigable Nancy, red with exertion, carrying between them a large heavy box addressed to me.

After the lad goes she brings a chisel and tries to open it, but the nails are so long and firm they resist her utmost strength.

Another attempt; another; and up goes the lid.

At this moment a hurried knock comes to the door, and a voice calls sharply,—

"Nancy, you are wanted directly, Miss Etta

has burst two buttons off her dress, and the first carriage is arrived; do make haste, will you?"

"Can you manage without me, miss?" she asks in a flurry.

"Yes, yes, away you go."

Jumping out of bed the moment her back is turned I throw on a warm dressing-gown, and diving my hands among billows of tissue-paper, draw forth—heaven only knows with what sensations—a richly repoussée silver tea-pot, cream ewer, and sugar-basin, a ditto ditto coffee-pot, a heavy antique silver cake-basket, a magnificent solid claret jug, a very old old silver tea-caddy, and a pair of candlesticks in the shape of Corinthian pillars.

They used to be in every-day use at Manor Place.

Each of them is a tragic chapter in the history of my Paradise Lost.

* * * * *

I open one eye.

A finger is gently raising the lid of the other, and a whisker tickling my cheek.

Dr. Munro, in his anxiety to discover if life be extinct, is poking his handsome old face close to mine.

Mr. and Mrs. Morrison in full dinner-dress are standing at the foot of the bed looking tenderly pitiful.

"Thank goodness!" ejaculates the doctor, springing off his knees, and to the floor.

Mr. Morrison blows his nose, his wife bursts into tears.

"My darling child," she says, drawing near, "do you recollect how you fainted?"

"No, did I faint?"

"Yes, dear, when Nancy showed in the doctor you were lying apparently dead on the floor, with a silver tea-pot clasped in your

arms, and ever so many pieces of plate scattered around."

"How long since?"

"Nearly five hours, it is now two in the morning."

CHAPTER VI.

WILT THOU HAVE THIS MAN ?

“ One, buried yet not dead,
Before whose face I no more bow my head,
Or bend my knee.”

Yes ! that is what he must have done ; sold the sapphire ring to recoup me. The 200*l.* is more than welcome, but well, well ! what's past is past the last links are broken that is all ! *Telle est la vie !*

Dressed in white satin, wreathed with orange blossoms, and clouded in soft transparent tulle that looks like morning mist, I am sitting before the looking-glass, left, at

my special request, to spend the last minutes of maidenhood alone.

Within a quarter of an hour, I shall have sworn to love, honour, and obey Patrick Beatoun till death us do part, yet, strive as I will—and on my knees I *have* striven—I cannot feel the least grain of love for him. More than that, since he arrived yesterday with the brother advocate who is to be groomsman, my former indifference has, to my horror, strengthened into a sort of sullen defiance.

Horace, who is in Hamburg, wrote me a short farewell note, which, after weeping over till it was almost illegible and kissing till it was nearly in tatters, I thrust into the fire this morning, in a sudden frenzy against him, and now regret more than tongue can tell.

Pat looks radiant, nay frisky, which does


not suit him, and jars upon me cruelly in my present state of mind.

He is an upright clever man, but not sympathetic, and of all defects in a character that is the worst.

It was his way of flinging himself headlong into other people's interests which made poor Horace so fascinating, though how he could feel affection for that low woman passes my comprehension.

I daresay it was anxiety to hide her away abroad, before our return to Edinburgh, which made him quit in such a hurry that most of his property is left in Pat's hands to dispose of. Certainly she would have been distressingly out of place among dear old Mrs. Frazer's surroundings.

Just to imagine Horace playing "Holy! holy! holy!" with her for audience, on his mother's sofa! (Faugh! the thought of her



always brings back the smell of her fusty shawl.) One comfort is, she can never desecrate the silver things by touching them! Ah! how happy we used to be of an evening—he reading! I making tea. Will he ever look back to those hours with regret? But I forget—O mon Dieu! mon Dieu! just to think of it; he was deceiving us all the time. Was married! and only (as his wife said) keeping her out of the way, for fear of offending his mother's pride. Such a Walpurgis Night life is! I fear I do not know much about religion, but as a matter of conscience I am honestly endeavouring to think all the evil I can of him, and, please God, shall continue so to do, till the weary farce of existence is finished. I wish it were now, on this my marriage day, for

“The sooner it's over the sooner to sleep,
And good-bye to the heart's weary moaning.”


Back of the looking-glass, I see the window, framing a section of stormy sky, and great plashes of sleet keep dashing against the panes. Not the most desirable weather for a wedding jaunt.

Ours, however, is only to occupy two days, as Pat, by some rare chance, has at last bagged a client, and is obliged to be in town.

In my private opinion, it is the fact of having actually a Case in hand, which is the cause of his hilarity, and not any pleasure he takes in me.

That was a strange mistake my dress-maker made last week, sending a dozen pairs of black, instead of white gloves, with my marriage paraphernalia.

Perhaps it is true, as she declares, that she had a large mourning order on hand, at the time; but, though not superstitious, I cannot help having my own thoughts about it.



The Morrisons are quite nice and kind, especially Etta, who is grateful, poor thing! because I have never flirted with Mr. Egerton since being engaged myself.

If they had behaved as humanely when I first came, I should never have thrown myself at Pat's head, which is the bare and ugly truth, although nobody could believe it, himself least of any.

He thinks he is marrying me for money, but unless I had expiated upon being friendless and homeless, he would never have dared to propose.

With me, it was "any port in a storm," though to look at me, as I sit here, who could credit it?

In the mirror what do I see? a graceful girl with gazelle eyes, and a face sufficiently beautiful to be a fortune, even without my 395/. a year.

Mr. Beatoun is a plain-looking, hard lawyer, with barely enough for bread, cheese, and boots, and I do not love him one bit, yet

Good gracious ! here comes Mr. Morrison, to conduct me to the drawing-room, where the ceremony is to take place.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ICE BURNS SORE.

Alas ! for the heart that is left forlorn.
If you live you must love ; if you love, regret.
It were better, perhaps, we had never been born,
Or better, perhaps, we could well forget.

“ I SEE nothing to cry about,” says my husband. “ It is certainly very kind of Frazer, but what logical connexion there is between a musical instrument and tears, I fail to perceive.”

We have just returned from our two days' marriage trip ; and the first thing that met my eyes was poor Horace's harmonium, set betwixt the windows of our sitting-room.

On the keys lay a short note requesting Mrs. Beatoun to accept of it and all his music.

Pat is so devoid of romance that he considers it merely an inferior sort of organ worth 50*l.* or 60*l.*, little thinking what a well-spring of melancholy pleasure it is to me, in the arid desert I must plod my weary way through.

Our lodgings are very comfortable, so unless the landlady turns out a vixen or bugs enter appearance, we shall probably not begin house-hunting till May.

This day week is fixed for sitting in state to be interviewed by my husband's friends, who are mostly professional brethren and their female belongings.

I am exercised how to make deep mourning look bridal for the occasion, and begin discussing the point after tea.

But, oh! the tiresomeness of dragging small talk out of an unimaginative man

after you are married to him ! It is my first attempt at being wifely and domestic, and in this particular phase of duty, may possibly be the last.

There is no doubt he is incurably metaphysical, and logical, and pugnaciously argumentative, but dry his converse is, and dry it shall remain.

A lady loved a swine,
"Honey," said she,
"I'll give thee, a silver trough."
"Grumph," said he.

I am certain he thinks me an idiot for asking whether he considers crape pleats, or jet trimming, prettiest on the body of a mourning dress ; and, albeit this is our first evening, in what for the present represents home, seems inclined to be off to his study, for a *spell* at that blessed and solitary client's papers. Oh, my prophetic soul ! he

is on his feet! "Excuse me, Roberta, I have been two days away from my work already, and must make up for it, but I shall not stay longer than I can help."

I do not care so much for him that my sensibilities are keenly hurt, but it would relieve my feelings, to pitch the tea-pot at his head.

Yet he does not mean to be unkind, it is simply the nature of the animal.

Thank goodness, I have poor Horace's harmonium to erect into a desert-shrine, where I may give free vent to my emotions by strumming, for, to be candid, my playing is not first-rate, though nobody could be fonder of music.

Thrilling, trembling, I open the instrument, hunt up the volume containing "Holy! Holy! Holy!" and strike the chords which sound to me like strains of

melody wafted from the far-off Eden I remember.

“I am sorry to disturb you, my dear,” says Pat, looking in at the door, with his brow crinkled into severe folds by the legal cogitation he has been engaged in. “I am sorry to interrupt you, but I really can NOT study when there’s the slightest noise. You will always have the whole day to yourself, I am generally out till four.”

It is fortunate he retires without waiting for an answer, as mine would certainly have made it necessary for him to appear in court to-morrow with a black patch on his eye.

* * * * *

I would die rather than mention the word “dress” again, but if he did not make an idol of business, instead of the pretty young wife he has only had a week in his

possession, he would be ravished with my appearance to-day, when we are "at home" for the first time, to receive callers.

What with flakes of white crape and flashes of jet, my mourning is the most becoming wear I ever had; but where's the good of looking nice, when you are tied for life to a wet blanket full of law?

Almost all the people who call are advocates and advocatesses, who consider the Parliament House the hub of creation. Refined folks enough, but so swaddled in local *convenances*, that the prospect of spending the rest of my days among them is like premature interment.

To look forward gives me cold shivers; to look back is to feel like Dives remembering the dainty purple caftans he used to wear, and the luscious wines and rich meats he made merry over.

Hearken to his cry *now*, "A drop of cold water, only a single drop!"

As through a glass darkly I begin to see that "*I thirst*," is the cry of the human. Everybody cannot keep his carriage, but who has not his private skeleton? Poor papa, for instance, and Mrs. Frazer, and Horace, ay! and the charming young bride, whom each individual of the forty-three who have called to-day thinks at the summit of happiness, being able to afford to marry the man of her choice, else why should she give herself to one so poor?

Ah me! it does not need *flames* to burn, *ice* can do it, held close to the tortured flesh.

"Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and

in health, and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him, so long as ye both shall live ? ”

Is it possible I dared to say, “ I will ” to that ? What a wonder God did not strike me dead with the lie on my lips !

* * * * *

At length our tiresome “ at home ” is over.

Five o'clock is striking as the last visitor says good-bye.

By way of “ wind up,” my husband remarks,—

“ This has been a wasted day ; so, Roberta, could you bid them let us have dinner a little earlier, to enable me to get to my work as soon as possible ? ”

“ Certainly.”

Away he goes, quite easy in his mind.

I gaze wistfully at myself in the pier-glass, wishing, with an undefinable sort of

yearning, that my soul were purer, less of the earth, earthy. I am not angry with Pat for what he has just said, but, oh ! that I had wings like a dove, to flee away and be at rest !

Opening the harmonium, I play "Holy ! Holy ! Holy !"

They say in Germany that two affinitive spirits can meet, by the intense desire to do so, however distant the bodies they inhabit. I long so to tell Horace how sorely the *ice* burns me, that I almost feel him at my side, understanding all I would fain express, by the chords he used to touch.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

THE DISCLOSURE.

“And, as the dove to far Palmyra flying,
From where her native founts of Antioch beam,
Weary, exhausted, longing, panting, sighing,
Lights sadly at the desert’s bitter stream.”

“You are quite as pretty as ever, and do not look a day older; nobody could believe you the mother of those two great boys! But I really must be going, mamma and papa expect me to *do* some shopping, and I don’t like to keep them waiting. Remember me very kindly to Mr. Beatoun.”

“Good-bye, now recollect we shall expect

all three of you at seven. It is quite an unceremonious party, only the Edingtons and Moncrieffs. You remember the Moncrieffs? he is colonel now, and you never saw such a whale as his wife has become. She was such a pretty little woman too! but time works changes, doesn't it?"

"Yes, indeed! I feel in a dream when I think that it is only seven years since Bella and I went out gay brides to India, and she, poor thing, has been six years in her grave, while here am I, a widow on papa and mamma's hands; for of course I shall reside at Heatherton, where they are very anxious to have me. Now you are quite sure I may come in my widow's cap?"

"Certainly. Farewell, dear, till seven."

Etta Egerton, *née* Morrison, has just been giving me the particulars of her husband's death including his last utterances, which,

were I in her place, I should either take poetical license with, or omit altogether.

He died of sunstroke and bitter beer, or bitter beer and sunstroke, but whichever it was, it would for her own sake be prudent to do the posthumous washing of his dirty linen in private.

Seeing her has set me a-thinking.

Seven years? I can scarcely believe I have been so long married, though Tom is six, and Brooke four. I knew Pat was clever, but did I ever dream he would get on so splendidly? No! for everybody speaks of his rapid rise at the bar as something unprecedented.


We have a very handsome house, and next May intend moving into a still larger one. We see a great deal of society, partly for it's own sake, partly to keep up my husband's business connexion.

Though naturally stingy he is fond of show. So thanks to that and that alone, I am one of the best-dressed women in town, being in fact the "Gilded Sign" above his shop-door.

Our two little boys are darlings, sunny-haired cherubs, such as poor Horace Frazer must have been in his youth. I love them, but am not the sort of woman to be *utterly* satisfied with the slightly mercenary affection of small boys.

I am not so good as I should be, but always endeavour to be truthful to my own soul, therefore although not unhappy as a wife, I do not pretend to myself that I am the reverse.

Pat and I never quarrel. Storms clear the atmosphere, and I sometimes wish we *could* get up a fight or two, just to vary our domestic monotony.



When Mrs. Egerton came in this morning, I was reading a tale called "A man made of Money," a bloodless, heartless, coated biped, composed of bank-notes. One can imagine him in his domestic relations. Well, I have the felicity to be wedded to a man made of law papers.

Of course, his incessant toil is for my sake, and the children's, and outsiders say, "My dear Mrs. Beatoun, there was *never* such a fortunate woman! Your husband is carrying all before him, and is safe to sit on the Bench before he is forty-five. How differently our unlucky friend Mrs. Allardyce is situated, with that handsome scamp of hers gadding about here, there, and everywhere, and never looking into a law book if he can help it."

All very true, but I sometimes wonder how long it takes a heart to forget itself

to stone! after seven prosperous married years mine is aching yet.

Pat's conduct is ruled by the moralities, he does not even carry a latch key; but the landscape of my life is neutral-tinted, instead of glowing with colour as it once did; and many things, music, fine scenery, even human beauty, give me a quaintly anguished sense of loss.

When Mr. and Mrs. Morrison and Mrs. Egerton arrive, we have a grand koo-too, for I have not seen the old people since my eldest son was two years old. I remember they happened to dine with us on his birthday, and drank his health.

A couple of advocates whom Pat invited at the Parliament House brings our party up to thirteen, though, except myself, no one notices the ominous number.

Little do I care for such petty triumphs

now-a-days, but everybody says I *shine* at the head of my own table.

On the present occasion I wear rich dark-blue silk, trimmed with quantities of black Brussels lace, and what to me is more becoming than any other head-dress, the slender diamond circlet that was my mother's.

Dinner is a success ; ours usually go off well, but as we are all chatting and making merry, I suddenly have the strangest sensation of poor Horace Frazer being beside me.

Perhaps talking over old times with Mrs. Egerton and her father and mother recalls him so vividly to my memory, for it is five years since we gave him up for lost.

Till that time, while he was wandering about the continent, he and Pat exchanged occasional business letters, but then he sailed for Australia, and we never heard again. The

ship duly arrived in port, so we suppose he died unknown among strangers.

We rarely mention his name, and ever since our marriage, my husband does so as "Frazer," never "Horace."

Mr. Edington, who is dining with us to-day, is a Writer to the Signet, and one of Pat's best employers ; so when in course of the evening his wife asks me as a favour to take her Visiting District for a fortnight, as she is going out of town, I consent, both on my husband's account and for her own sake ; as she is a sweet old lady it always does me good to be with.

"Thank you very much, my dear," she says, as we sit together, "you quite take a weight off my mind. I shall send you a list of the families in the morning. There are nine in the district, but four of them can stand over till my return. Not being accus-

tomed to that sort of work, I suspect you will find five quite sufficient."

"Must I go every day?"

"No, my child, that would be putting your shoulder to the wheel with a vengeance. If you give a quarter of an hour to each of the five, once a week, you will do very well. Have you ever been in the Cowgate? It is, as you are aware, the lowest of our slums, but, so far as I know, quite free of fever at present. There's a poor dying woman named Pender, whom I wish you could see among the first. She is neither interesting nor grateful, but is in the last stage of pulmonary consumption, and has a brute of a husband."

The list duly arrives next forenoon by post, but a constant dribble of callers detains me till it is time to dress for a dinner party at the Solicitor-General's.

The following morning, however, armed with my purse and Bible, I start for my first essay in district-visiting, saying to myself as I walk along, "I wonder whether I should give each of the five families, a shilling or eighteenpence, besides reading them the chapters Mrs. Edington told me?"

Pioneered by the local policeman, I reach Mrs. Pender's place of abode, in a filthy narrow "close" (alley), uglier, grimier, worse-smelled and more poverty-stricken, than I ever imagined a street could be.

At the bottom of the stair, glancing over Mrs. Edington's list, he says,—

"Some o' them's a roughish lot, miss, if I was you, I would keep away from numbers 287 and 291. *Old missioner ladies* goes there, but they aren't the thing for the like o' you, ma'am."

"Do you know this Mrs. Pender?"

“ Oh aye, mem ! she’s safe enough, poor body, but her man is a worthless scamp, she’ll no trouble him long, with that cough o’ hers, and it is little he cares how soon, the blackguard ! I saw her at the baker’s shop the other day with a pair o’ black eyes, his *hand o’ write*, they say he was a *clerk* at one time, begging your pardon, miss, for my joke.”

I thank him by words and a shilling, which last elicits the information that I shall find him still in the close, in case of needing further guidance.

I climb the ancient stairs which once were trod by the nobles of the land, but are now worn into such hollows that it is all I can do to keep from falling on my nose.

Up four flights, and then I knock with the handle of my parasol on a battered old door, at the off-end of a half-dark landing.

Ever since I experienced that mysterious sense of Horace's presence, the day before yesterday, it has, so to speak, floated around me at intervals! seemed to come step for step with me up these stairs! is now, to my intense and awed consciousness, beside me here at the door.

Receiving no reply to my first knock, I repeat it.

"Lift the sneck (latch) and come in," calls a voice like the wolf's in Red Riding Hood, only very weak and tremulous, "I'm no able to rise."

I enter, and, after groping three or four steps along a semi-dark passage, find myself in a miserable apartment, where the owner of the voice is sitting up on a heap of rags which represents a bed.

So far as can be judged through emaciation and dirt, she is a youngish woman, and stares

wildly at me out of her towsy locks, and ragged night-cap.

The weather is close and "muggy," but there is a fire burning on the hearth, and what with the heat, and stifle, and stench, I feel as if I should faint.

"Sit down, mem," she gasps, between two frightful fits of coughing, and literally unable to stand for the moment, I sink into the only chair, a broken-backed arm one covered with tattered hair-cloth, and which looks as if stuffed with vermin.

By good luck I find a rose lozenge in the pocket of my dress. So, putting it in my mouth and my little gold flacon to my nostrils, I inquire, "If she has been long ill!"

"Ay, mem, but I'll no put off lang noo, my lungs is aw gane!"

"Have you no one to attend to you?"

"Oo ay, mem! the woman's lassie down

the stair does ony bit thing I need, but she is out a message, and her mother is ill wi' the dumb-palsy and canna be long left her lane (by herself)."

I am horrified at such wretchedness, and "rushed through" by a sudden conviction of my ingratitude to Providence for the many blessings of my own lot, nay, I almost expect instant punishment, for the "something-wanting-something-missed" feeling, which throughout seven prosperous years has taken the pith out of all my joys, and made *Cui bono* be oftener on my lips than *Te Deum*.

"Could you eat some calves'-foot jelly, if I were to send it, a mutton chop, or grapes?" I ask, wrung with pity. Her hacking cough tortures me, and there is blood upon the rag she spits in!

"No, no, miss, I canna eat nothing noo, unless maybe an orange, or such as that, to

cool my throat. The other lady has been real kind, but I'll sune be at peace, this cough will finish me."

"Well, here is half a sovereign, let the girl you speak of get whatever you fancy."

"Thank ye, ma'am, it's far too much."

"Mrs. Edington, the other lady who comes to see you, said I should read the Bible, but you are not able for a whole chapter. Shall I just give you two or three verses, to think about when you are alone, and suffering, and weary?"

"If it is no too much trouble, ma'am, I would take it very kind."

I never dealt with anybody's soul before, and considering that Mrs. Pender is supposably more of a "goat" than a "sheep," the passage of Scripture I select is perhaps not too appropriate, but I always used to be thrilled through by the tender pathos of the concluding verses of the seventh chapter of

Revelation, when Horace Frazer read them at family worship.

“These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For . . .”

Footsteps come stumbling along the passage, the door is pushed open, and a bloated, drunken-looking man in tattered black clothes and a battered hat staggers in, filling the place with the fumes of whisky.

He glares with bloodshot eyes at the dying woman, then at me, sneers an insolent “Humph!” totters out again and down stairs, to my infinite relief.

“Who is it?” I ask, shaking with fright,
“your husband?”

“Just that, I’m sorry to say, mem, he is
angry I’m no dead yet, but I’ll no be long
noo.”

With a tremble in my voice I, at her request, finish what I was reading.

“For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto fountains of living waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

My own are full.

Some lines I have not thought of for years come sing-songing up from a forgotten cell of memory.


“Vous qui pleurez !
Venez à ce Dieu car Il console.”

“Farewell,” I say, rising, “I hope to come and see you again.”

“ Oh, lady ! lady ! ” she exclaims so earnestly, that it brings on a fit of coughing which I fear will end her there and then ; “ Oh, ma’am, dinna go away till I tell ye what a wicked sinner I am ! I dare not face my Maker unless I confess about Mr. Frazer. I knew you the minute I saw you come in, ma’am, you are the young Miss that was to have been married to him, poor ill-used gentleman ! that I’m feared God will burn me in hell for.”

“ What of Mr. Frazer ? ”

“ Well, ma’am, when you was staying in Manor Place you’ll maybe remember him helping an old woman that fell in the street and broke her arm. That was my mother, and many was the half-crown and bottle of wine he gave us, beside reading the Bible at her bedside. I was promised at *that* time, to marry him that I did marry, to my sorrow. He was a writer’s clerk, but could not afford



to support a wife, he said. When he came to our house he used to see Mr. Frazer, and the devil put it into his head, to lay a trap for the young gentleman, who was a perfect saint, and so good to my mother. He was about to pass as a minister, and be married to you, ma'am—so we was told—and John Pender said that by threatening him with what he called a 'Declarator of marriage,' I could screw money out of him, for me and John to marry on."

"A Declarator of marriage, what do you mean?"

"It is when a woman brings an *action* against a man, to prove she is his wife; mine was a lie forged in hell, every word false from beginning to end, and if the Declarator *had* been raised we would have lost the case, but what we trusted to was that rather than let his name be mentioned in connexion

wi' such a story; at that *particular* time, Mr. Frazer would pay smartly; poor gentleman he was nigh beside himself wi' distress, but I was that much in love with John Pender, I would have committed murder if he bade me; O Lord God, how can I meet Thy face in judgment!"

I am quite past speaking; the great mistake of my spoiled life rises before me, as the result of my own headstrong rashness. If I had but waited—Oh! if I had but waited only one short week, before taking my fate into my own hands.

"Let me confess the whole, ma'am, it'll ease my conscience. We got 20*l.* and 30*l.* from time to time, to keep us quiet; and then, as John saw the more we asked the more we got, he made bold and said that for 300*l.*, cash down, I would sign a paper to say

I had no more claims on him. That was what I came about the night you opened the door, Miss.

“The 300*l.* was paid *plack and farthing*, in less than a week, and we got married; but God’s curse has never been off us from that day to this. John made a beast of his-self wi’ drink, and took the ‘D. T.’ and soon ran through every farthing of our ill-gotten gear. I would’na have been on my death-bed if it had’na been for him pouring four bottles o’ Scotch porter over me, when I was in my bed, sweating off a heavy cold wi’ a Dover’s ‘Powther.’ *That* settled me; he is my murderer, though the law canna hang him for it, the drunken brute that he is; curse him!”

Speaking so much makes her spit blood and cough frightfully.

“Let her suffer, she deserves it!” is my

inward cry. Yearning bitterly over "what might have been," but for her sin, how *can* I pity her?

In a frenzy of useless regret, I seem to batter at the Gates of Heaven and cry, "Open! Open! and let me in, earth is so dreary!"

The words I have been reading still murmur through my inner consciousness; "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." Never hunger again for vanished love; never thirst in vain for the companionship of a kindred spirit.

"I'm thankful I have gotten my conscience eased, ma'am," gasps Mrs. Pender.

A girl enters, it is the lassie from downstairs come to see if anything be needed?

I rise to go.

"Thank ye, ma'am, for coming," pants the wretched woman, "it is a great easement to

my mind to have told you everything, and thank you for the half sovereign. If ye think o' coming back, ye'll need no to put off about it, I canna last long wi' this cough tearing me to bits."

The sight of a fellow-creature in such suffering is heart-rending, but I could not bear to visit Horace's betrayer again.

"Here are five shillings more," I say, laying them on the bed. "Get what you require. Farewell."

Yet she has done me more service than words can express.

Stepping down the dirty broken stairs I thank Heaven, with tears in my eyes, that Horace's character is cleared, though too late for *this* world's happiness. As they say in Germany! "It is dear honey that is licked off thorns," and sure enough that poor woman's words were sharp enough thorns to me. But

I have got the honey now, to eat and be refreshed with, again and again, even till his hand and mine are once more locked together, in the better country where, knowing each other even as we are known, mistakes can never occur to sunder lives and wring hearts.

CHAPTER II.

WEEDS OF VELVET.

“ My soul,
With its burden of fear and hope, of labour and play,
Hearken what the past doth witness, and say.
‘ Rust in thy gold—a moth in thine array.’ ”

I USUALLY have the children down for a game at romps for half an hour before their bedtime, and a precious *row* they make.

They are pretty darlings, and, if either of them took measles or scarletina or any other infantile ailment, I should perform prodigies of nurse tending and maternal devotion. But to say I find them like pellets of gold leaf, fill-

ing a hollow tooth, and making it as good as ever, would not be true.

The hollows of my heart have long ceased to ache, leaving, however, a chronic, dull, yet quite endurable sort of pain; and I go shares in blind man's buff and hunt the slipper, as I do other duties, such as adding up the weekly house-books or taking a shower bath on a cold morning.

When my boys are old enough for *swallow-tails* and white "chokers," I believe I shall find them comforts and consolations, but between six and twenty-six there is a great gulf, which the mere fact of motherhood cannot bridge across, although I have heard a woman declare she found perfect companionship, in a baby of three months old.

"Mamma dear!" entreats Master Tom when nurse appears at the drawing-room door, "may we stay just a *little* bit longer, to play at horses with you?"

“Pay at osses wis oo,” echoes Brooke, who always seconds his elder brother, and accordingly goes among us by the name of Ditto.

Pat, who can't be troubled with children, says I spoil ours out and out, and indeed I hardly ever do refuse them anything, dear little lads.

When, therefore, their present request is denied point-blank, they are considerably taken aback, and would probably howl, but for the instant administration of three lumps of sugar apiece.

The fact is I am dying to be alone, to think quietly over Mrs. Pender's disclosure, and the complications her cruel crime led to.

My favourite posture for meditation is lying on the flat of my back with my hands clasped above my head, in which attitude, on a sofa, I now begin revising the five months

into which the whole romance of my life was compressed.

This forenoon, when the dying woman let in daylight upon the mystery of Horace's marriage, I felt nearly mad, but since then have received some callers, dressed, dined with my husband, and given "Buttons" a sound scold for breaking the lid of a vegetable-dish at dinner. All gone through, in a kind of nervous anxiety for the moment, when, with none by, I may re-open the old sluices, and swim ecstatically in the flood of romance, which is waiting to rush through, as fresh and exhilarating as seven years ago.


Alas, alas, comfortably prone on a spring-squabbed couch, with my eyes fixed dreamily on the gaselier, it slightly shocks me to find, that feelings, once as strong as passions, which for years I have supposed chained

up by my own sense of integrity, instead of leaping in now, at the word of command, like giants refreshed, glide softly back, mere faded dreams.

“O Gioventù, primavera della vita, Addio.”

Now, without the slightest chance of hysterics, I think over old times. Such a headstrong inconsiderate “frenzified” young woman I must have been, to condemn poor Horace upon the flimsiest possible circumstantial evidence, and then, without giving him time to *lodge his defences*, rush off like a maniac and all but ask Pat to marry me, quite aware neither of us cared a pinch of snuff for the other.

No thanks to us that, instead of turning out a respectable couple, we have not finished up in the divorce court. It never struck me before, but in a sense it really *was* hard lines



for my husband to be dragged in to wed a young woman he did not want, although he did her cash. I wonder if Annie Morrison would have suited him better?

Ah, if one of those ministering spirits the Bible tells about, had only given us a hint that we were making a muddle of our lives!

“Alas, how easily things go wrong,
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
Then there follows a mist, and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.”

Pat is so strong-footed himself he cannot feel for his neighbour's corns, but it *was* a pity Horace did not confide his trouble at first, to one who could have steered him safely through the *legal* reefs of it. Poor fellow! I wonder where and how he died? How sad it all is!

Nevertheless the conviction that he never loved but *me*, is an infinite comfort, feeling


which, I shall better be able to do my duty to Pat and the children, and more worthily occupy the station, to which it has pleased an inscrutable Providence to call me.

The idea that the passionate devotion I poured out on my first love, was worse than wasted, has always made me feel so bitterly humiliated, that perhaps I have *not* been as patient with my husband as I ought. Now, however, that all is cleared up, I shall turn over a new leaf.

No amount of milk and liver, would convert Pat into a nice domestic cat, but at any rate I shall stroke him the right way, if it be in the power of flesh and blood to do it.

In the next place, why should I not satisfy some inexpressible and contradictory longings, by putting on mourning for *him*, who once was all in all to me?

If Jephthah's daughter went in sack-



cloth for a mythical husband, why should not I wear black silk for one, who would have been *mine*, if the course of true love had run smoothly.

Not *deep* black, to make people ask who it is for, but no colours in my dress the next fortnight or three weeks.

Had we been aware of his decease, about the period of its occurrence, my husband and I should certainly have worn crape. Were I to propose such a thing at this time of day, he would suggest a blister for my head and a strait-jacket.

We dine at Sheriff Corbett's to-morrow. When my lawful lord enters the room with me on his arm in black velvet and silver ornaments how surprised he would be if he knew it was a kind of beatified widow's weeds for his old companion !

But I might wear tigers' skins, for all the

interest he takes in my dress ; so I shall, as mourning-warehousemen say, have the melancholy pleasure to be attired like a funeral pall, and nobody the wiser except myself, and perhaps he for whom it is worn.

Poor darling Horace ! I hope he will know. Why shouldn't he ? are there not more things in earth and heaven than are dreamt of in our philosophy ?

CHAPTER III.

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER.

“Let’s mar our pleasant days no more,
Catch at to-day—Forget the days before.”

My husband and I are quoted as a happy pair, and never by any chance quarrel.

Ever since I made a vow to that effect two years ago, I have tried hard to render our union something more tender and true than a mere co-partnery [in goods, but am at last fain to content myself with the negative happiness of not being miserable.

We are as God made us, and a cool, dry

man like Pat can no more help it than an ass can be a race-horse.

The boys are the warmest-hearted dear little fellows possible, but, thank goodness, take after their father in the matter of brains.

After lunch to-day, without quitting the table, I began reading the report of Pat's speech in the Bingley and Blacklock case, which is creating such a sensation that the public journals throw off tri-hourly editions, and it is said her Majesty has constant telegrams sent to Balmoral.

It is the last case I should have thought my husband could do justice to, such a passionate picture as it is of love, jealousy, and murder. But he has acquitted himself splendidly, and, during the fortnight the trial has been on, has been in everybody's mouth, but scarcely had time to exchange

words with me, dining as often as not alone, and working till three or four in the morning.

His address to the jury is so interesting, that at half-past four, when he comes back from the Parliament House, I am still busy over the newspaper.

What has spell-bound me is the touching pathos with which he describes an invisible barrier that existed betwixt his wretched client and the wife he appeared to hate, yet secretly adored.

“Gentlemen of the Jury, I am not here to attempt to bias your verdict by an appeal to the feelings, but let me just say that, of all tortures, one of the greatest, to an innately honourable man who loves his wife passionately, must be to possess a secret regarding his own past life which, were he to disclose, would sunder them more effec-

tually than land or sea. As you are now aware, the secret the defendant started in married life with involved no infraction of human laws, the pity was there should have been concealment at all, and that, from the first, husband and wife could not see eye to eye, like the blessed pair who dwelt amid the flowery bowers of Eden."

As I read I tremble, a new light breaks over the past. What if all the time I have fretted because Pat was not sensitive and demonstrative, he has been quite aware that for years an idealized image of Horace stood like a wall betwixt my lawful husband and the affection his constant goodness to me certainly entitled him to expect?

In that case, how patient he has been, and doubtless how heart-hungry? No wonder, poor fellow, he entered so deeply into that wretched Mr. Blackburn's feelings!

No wonder his address drew such plaudits from the audience that the presiding judge threatened to clear the court unless they were stopped instantly !

With the newspapers lauding his legal acumen and perspicacity, and exhaustive cross-examinations, and what not, he has been a sort of hero in a small way for the last ten days, and so impulsed am I by the fact, that I do the very last thing which could come into my head in the ordinary routine of events.

When, with his hat still on, he looks into the room, I rush across, lay my hands upon his shoulders, and with moist eyes exclaim, "How very, very proud I am of you !"

Fresh from gaining a unanimous verdict, with all expenses, he is perhaps, like myself, a little shaken out of his usual rut, but—will wonders ever cease ?—for only reply,

hugs my waist, kisses me once ! twice ! thrice ! and makes off to his study with a look I have not seen on his face since the long vanished evenings when I used to teach him the art of flirtation in poor Mrs. Frazer's drawing-room.

If Lord Melville's statue had jumped off his monument in St. Andrew's Square and walked here to embrace me, I could not have been more surprised, but since the difficult first step is taken towards a more demonstrative style of civility, it shall not be my fault if we slide back into the old frigid way.

Rome, however, was not built in a day. When we meet at dinner, with the flush of excitement cooled down, I suspect we are both, *tant soit peut*, bashful at the recollection of our abnormal spurt of tenderness.

I am, I know ; but bravely tide over the awkwardness by talking twice as much and

gaily as usual, taking more pains to fascinate my husband than I could possibly have done had he remained to see me again after dinner that evening at Nieder-Baden, instead of continuing his journey without remembering my existence.

Dear me ! how like a dream it all seems ! To think that the Englishman who trod upon my skirt on the hotel stair, and the celebrated "pleader," sitting opposite me peeling an apple, are one and the same ! And that I am his wife ! and that these two sunny-haired darlings in blue velvet at each side of the table are our sons.

CHAPTER IV.

JUST MELLOWED BY REGRET.

“So we two went together, in glowing August weather.”

“Now, my dear madam, do not alarm yourself without cause. He’ll come all right, I hope. It is as I tell you, his liver is slightly congested, and, or rather *because*, he has been overworked. What he requires is a thorough rest from business. Take him abroad for a month or two of idleness. The court rises next week, so there’s no difficulty about that.”

"But, doctor, you are quite sure there's no danger?" I asked, with trembling lips.

"None, if he drops work at once, and takes an easy time of it on the continent for a while.

After seeing Doctor Stuart out, I stop a few minutes to compose myself before going back to my husband, who has been looking wretchedly ill for some time past, but, when I wanted him to see a medical man, always declared he had no time to think of his health, till the end of the session.

Now it has come, I am in agony lest we have delayed too long.

Ever since that day, three months ago, when he gained the Bingley and Blacklock case, and which was a turning-point in our lives, we have been, oh! so happy together! so very happy that I don't believe I could survive if anything happened to him.

Nobody knows how I hate myself, for making him feel so lonely and miserable, as he must have done all those seven years I was so "stand-offish."

Idiot that I was, ever to suppose him cold and heartless ! He is the most affectionate of men, but, poor fellow ! how could he show the love he felt to a self-contained icicle of a woman, who kept him at arm's length and worshipped an ideal, the *motif* of which, so to speak, was dead and gone.

"Now, dear," I say, entering the library and looking as bright as I can to keep up his spirits, "I shall take you in hand, and make your holidays so enjoyable that you will grudge coming home again. Where shall we go first? See! here are Murray and Baedeker. Let us pick out the nicest route to the Black Forest. You know we have got to stay there a while for the smell of the pines."

Sitting side by side on the couch we grow quite interested in our research, and till that day week when we leave by train for London, my heart, head, and hands are fuller than they ever were before.

Pat protests against being spared all trouble and fatigue, but to do things for him is my delight, and, as he laughingly declares, if he would let me shave him and pare his nails, I should gladly.

The children are to be with dear Mrs. Edington during our absence, as they are too young to travel. So Pat and I go without any encumbrance except our luggage.

We start to-morrow morning, and after tea to-night get talking over old times.

He perfectly remembers my appearance when he tore my dress at Baden, and says I don't look an hour older, though much prettier.

“Blarney, sir, nothing but blarney,” I

answer with a smile on my lip and a tear in my eye.

I had a hearty fit of weeping all by myself to-day, after picking out his first three grey hairs. I wish they had been my own.

I must now go and hurry him off to bed to get strength for the journey to-morrow.

My dearest! my dearest! if you should not get well after all, may God in His mercy be pleased to let us die together.

CHAPTER V.

THE HERR EMIGRATION AGENT.

“ Only, they had lost a crown,
Only, to them those days of yore
Could come back never more.”

SLOW travelling and idleness are making a new man of my husband.

We arrived to-day at this village of Dorfen, but the mid-day sun makes it too warm for walking, so, while Pat rests after our ten miles drive, I write to our kind friend Mrs. Edington.

“ . . . I know you and dear Mr. Edington will be glad to hear that my husband

continues to improve; so much so that we have altered our programme, and, instead of making direct for the Black Forest by the usual route, diverge into bye-paths, and discover the queerest villages and natives imaginable.

“It was Pat’s proposal, and he calls it our marriage-jaunt. In one sense it is, for we had none at the legitimate time. Our wedding took place in stormy winter weather, so a day and a half per train was quite enough of a trip then.

“He is looking almost himself again, and getting quite a good appetite.

“They say if you keep a thing seven years, you are sure to find a use for it, which is the case with my German. It was once almost my native tongue, and such a comfort it is now to be able to do all the bargaining &c., &c., so that my dear invalid has

not even the trouble of reading the newspapers. We have bought the quaintest-looking carriage, a sort of fanciful little waggon, and trust to the Fates for horses and drivers, which Fates have as yet catered tolerably for us. It is charming to go where and when we please, instead of being at the mercy of post-waggons and railways, and we feel like better-class Gipsies. The 'here' natives took us for a bride and bridegroom, so we alighted amid tremendous cheers and most simply unconventional remarks upon our personal appearance, to Pat's infinite amusement. You never saw such a laugher as he has become. I tell him it is to show his teeth, which are beautiful, only nobody noticed them when he looked so solemn. This is such a pretty little place, with ninety inhabitants, and the nearest town fifteen miles off, staple product, long-legged porkers that roam the

adjacent forest in droves of a hundred or so, chaperoned by herds clad in leather, and carrying iron staves furnished with chains and rings to reclaim stragglers.

“The room where I write has a huge antique dark-wood linen-press at one end, two white beds, a blue-curtained alcove for ablutions, three wooden chairs, a heavy table, as much carpet as keeps its feet from catching cold, and a coloured woodcut of our most gracious Queen, in red hair, pea-green robes, and a pink “Marie-Stuart” cap.

“Here is Pat insisting I shall come out for a stroll, sun or *no* sun, so I must close.

“How are my pets? Kiss them both for both of us over and over. We miss them, and we don’t, which sounds unparental, but is true nevertheless. Neither of us would be without them for anything, but at present

and in point of fact, are as happy as it is possible to be in this lower world.

“Pat says ditto, ditto, ditto. He is standing at my back reading what I write, which I call rude.

“Remember us affectionately to your husband.. How can we ever be grateful enough for your kindness to our children? Tell them we are so glad they are good boys, and believe me,

“Ever your very loving,

“ROBERTA BEATOUN.

“P.S. Address your next to Schwalbad, towards which we shall begin to wend tomorrow. Tell Tom and Brooke we shall bring them such pretty German and Swiss toys.”

LETTER 2.

“ Ah, my dearest Mrs. Edington, how little we know what is before us ! When I wrote ten days since, we intended quitting this little village next morning, but God has ordered otherwise. My darling husband became very ill during the night, which was wet and stormy, so ill that I could not leave him a minute. Burning fever, agony of pain, and no doctor nearer than fifteen miles. I despatched a messenger on horseback for him at daybreak, but before he arrived my darling was slightly delirious. His illness is rheumatic fever.

“ Dr. Möltke is wonderfully ‘ up to things,’ for a German country practitioner, and at my urgent entreaty remained with us four days till dear Pat was in the fair way of recovery. He still comes every second day. His patient

is as weak as water, but, thank God, progressing steadily towards health.

“The people of the house are most kind, but do not know a syllable of English, so I never quit my husband by night or day.

“Dear friend, words cannot express my gratitude to God for sparing him. If he had died, I firmly believe I should have been buried with him. I have sometimes of late fancied that the greatness of my earthly happiness was making my heart soar heavenwards, but I now fear my supposed gratitude to God was simply the clinging of my affections to my beloved, as roses cluster round a frail alabaster pillar. He is a model invalid, patient, brave and hopeful. Dr. Möltke says it helps his recovery. He was half an hour on the sofa to-day, and has taken a good deal of nourishment. Only fancy! I have turned cook, and concoct the most delicious veal

and chicken soups, the native *cuisine* being too greasy for a touchy stomach. Pat says I have missed my vocation, nature having evidently intended me for a cook.

“If he goes on as well for a few days longer, I think I shall lie up for a day myself, although I don’t believe I could venture upon more than a dog-watch, and should be sure to sleep with one eye open. Do you ever feel that the uncertain hold one necessarily has of even the best and dearest here below, deepens one’s love for them?”

“Sitting at my husband’s bedside, I have had a good many solemn and some remorseful thoughts, but with heaven’s aid I shall for the future be a truer yoke-fellow, helping and cheering him as he trudges along under the burdens and cares of life.

“Embrace our darlings for us. I know you tell them not to forget their little

prayers for poor dear 'daddy's' speedy recovery.

"What you mention about the entertainment at the Gillies' christening-party amused us very much. Pat says Gillies *père* always *did* remind him of the Highland cateran who refused extreme unction, as being a waste of oil.

"With our united affectionate regards and thanks to you and dear Mr. Edington,

"I am, yours ever,

"ROBERTA BEATOUN."

Having sealed my letter, I begin arranging my invalid for the day, and am in the act of washing his face with a sponge when Dr. Möltke arrives.

He is delighted with his patient's improvement. "Pulse better, tongue ditto, *sehr gut*! How did he sleep?"

“Beautifully, doctor ; from eight last night till half-past two, then from one till a quarter to four, and from five till eight, when I gave him his breakfast.”

“That also is good : but, lady, I must now insist you yourself will lie down for a few hours, or I shall have two patients instead of one.”

“Yes, Doctor,” puts in Pat, in his deplorable German, “I wish you would make her take some rest. I don’t believe she has slept two hours on end since I have been ill.”

“The *frau* hears that ?” says Dr. Möltke, shaking his big-ringed, dirty-nailed, fat forefinger waggishly at me. “Eh ! she hears ? Yes, you must sleep till evening, but first have some wine and soup ; you are too pale. Lizbet will sit beside your good husband. She is a solid-minded maiden, and has been

house-mistress here since the landlord lost his wife. She understands sick people. I shall give her orders about Herr Beatoun's diet on my way out."

Now that my anxiety about Pat is so far quieted, I feel how greatly want of sleep and fatigue have told upon me. Indeed, before the doctor came I had grave doubts whether my strength could possibly hold out another day. And thrice over during the night, when standing at the lamp to count the drops of Pat's medicine, I became for a moment faint, blind, and deadly sick, but it passed off both times in a violent rush-out of cold sweat.

I feel it a trial to leave my husband, even to steady old Lizbet's care, but he now knows sufficient German to at least ask for any thing he is likely to want before I return to my post.

In a bunchy scarlet petticoat, dark blue jacket, and snow-white quilted cap, the old woman sits down by the bed with her everlasting knitting, and, I dare say, thinks me "no end of a fidget" for leaving so many directions about the sick Herr's comfort, just as if she were not known far and near for the best nurse in the parish.

I am only going to the room at the other end of the passage, but it is the first time I have quitted Pat since his illness, and feels like a farewell.

Perhaps my nerves are shaky. I know it is absurd for my eyes to be brimful of tears when I kiss him good-bye. Yet I cannot help it.

* * * * *

On the dressing-table I find the wine and soup ordered by Dr. Möltke, but as I lift the

spoon to my mouth, the faint sick sensation of last night returns.

I stagger to the bed, and fall back on it.

* * * * *

Merciful heaven! where am I?


I hear voices; but what is this pulpy darkness that clings and smothers like dusty velvet?

I try to grope, but seem to be turned into granite, yet feel hands fingering me.

"Ach!" says one of the voices, "what a terrible thing it is to die when one is still so young and pretty!"

"That is so; but, quick, hand me across the wreath for her head. There! that fits nicely, now doesn't it?"

"Jah, jah; how lovely the white roses look in her dark hair!"



“Will the noble Herr, her husband, come to view the corpse, think'st thou?”

“I know not; they say his fever has returned.”

“Well, well! in any case we must make her look fine; it will console him.”

“A splendid corpse she surely will be with so fine a robe. Hein! they must be mighty rich, these English, to wear such cambrics and laces for night-gowns; it is a positive shame to bury such beautiful stuffs in the earth.”

“Look here, Gretchen. Should these red roses be in the hands?”

“No; place them on the breast, and cross the hands to show all her rings. Soh! That will do. Stupid pig! you have let fall a drop of grease on the sheet! How often must I tell you always to carry a candle straight?”

I strain desperately to open my eyes, but a carved image on a tombstone might as well try.

Oh my God ! Am I in a trance ? Perhaps I shall be buried alive ! I have heard of people being found turned in their coffins.

I wrench fiercely to tear my fingers off my bosom. All in vain ! all in vain !

“ Be quick, girls,” says a male voice, “ we must retire, the Herr, her husband, is coming presently.”

“ Himmel ! is he able ? ”

“ The Herr emigration-agent is assisting him ; it was a lucky chance he happened to pass this way. He was already at Ham-
burgh with the emigrants he had collected, and ready to sail for Australia with them, when he heard of some others in this quarter willing to go (Heinriche Drechsler’s three sons among the rest) ; that is why he is here.

With these he will go to-morrow to embark.
Soh ! ”

“ Ach ! It was a pity Dr. Möltke’s leg got broken yesterday ! He is skilful, he might have saved her, perhaps, poor lady ! ”

“ Not so, not so ! When I carried up her supper she was already as dead as a salt herring. Hush, let us depart ! here come the gentlemen.”

Silence ! Hideous darkness that feels alive, I, lying in it as immovable as lead, expecting to be presently lifted into a coffin, and carried out for burial.

A door opens.

Footsteps.

A trailing sound, as of a feeble person being helped along.

“ Set the chair nearer the bed,” says a voice I recognize as the landlord’s. “ Steady there ! that’ll do, sir. Now place your feet

on this stool. Soh! Just touch the bell when you want me, sir."

He retires, shutting the door after him.

"I cannot stand it!" cries my husband, sobbing pitifully, and pressing his face to mine. "My wife, my wife, whom I was only beginning to know—gone away from me—away from me for ever—Oh! oh! oh!"

"Come, Beatoun, you will harm yourself if you give way like this, recollect how weak you are, my poor fellow, and let me assist you back to bed."

"Horace! Horace!" I shriek without utterance. "Why have you come so late, my darling?—too late ever to know how dearly I have loved you through it all!"

My poor husband is still moaning with his cheek on mine.

"My heart aches for you, Beatoun, and I

know how desolate you must feel ; but think of the blissful moment when you shall meet again to part no more, in the sinless, sorrowless home on high."

"My wife, my wife !" sobs Pat, his lips on my cold forehead.

"Come, my poor fellow, this will never do. You'll kill yourself. Why, how you are trembling, man ! I hope you have not taken a chill. Here, lean on my arm,—or stay, we had better get the landlord to help you to bed."

"No, don't ring yet, till I confess my villany towards you."

"Hush ! You are not able for speaking."

"Horace, I am dying, let me tell you all. You recollect coming to me early one Christmas morning in great distress about a 'declarator of marriage' that blackguard woman at Stock Bridge threatened you with ?"

“Perfectly.”

“The whole thing was a barefaced swindle to squeeze money out of you. I saw that at a glance, and in common honesty was bound to bid you snap your fingers at her and her claims. Unfortunately, as the marriage-law stands in Scotland it is easy for an unprincipled woman to bring such an action against a perfectly innocent individual. No court would or could sustain the cause; but what the vile raiser of it trusts to is that her victim will as they phrase it, ‘bleed freely,’ rather than have his name breathed upon. Had a client consulted me that morning, I should have said, ‘Defy her, and never think more about it,’ but to *you* my earliest and trusting friend, I . . .”

“Please say no more, Beatoun, believe me, I would rather you didn’t.”

“I must. Not half an hour before you

came, the post had brought me an official intimation of the stoppage of Grinton's bank, where every penny I possessed was invested. I was also in debt. My case was desperate.

"As you know, I always felt convinced that in time I should make my mark at the bar, but now, without a shilling for bread, there seemed nothing for it but to shoulder a spade and go to one of the colonies as a common labourer. I was balancing that and blowing out my brains, when you entered my room and the devil into me."

"Do stop, Beatoun!"

"Curse me, Horace, I'm sure you ought. I knew you meant to marry Miss Gathorne, but had not spoken yet. If I could get hold of her money, I was saved. By putting you off the field, I *might* succeed. I was so desperate it seemed worth trying. I told you to temporize with the fiend who called herself

your wife. When I got to Heatherton, if I found your ward did *not* know that you were supposed to be married, I meant to have informed her."

"No more, for mercy's sake, Pat; I shall not listen."

"I'm dying, Horace, I need not go into details; but when poor Roberta at once accepted me, I took for granted she was aware how it was with you. My dear, dear wife, the best and dearest ever man had, I did not then care three straws for, apart from her cash, although only the God I have sinned against knows how deeply I have since learned to love her. Villain that I was, if she had not taken me, I should have at once proposed to the youngest Miss Morrison.

"You loath me not more than I hate myself, most men slide by stages from virtue to vice, I fell headlong into crime I should have

scorned the idea of when you and I walked along the moonlit streets only ten hours before."

"Did you ever tell your wife about that woman?"

"Never, never, but if I sinned, Horace, I suffered. During many years, when I almost worshipped the ground my dear wife trod on, she never seemed to be mine, there always was an invisible something that kept us apart, and sometimes I have speculated sorrowfully, whether the spirit of my betrayed friend were not present as an avenger. Now I have confessed all. Can you forgive a miserable dying man?"

"I forgive you, but it killed my dear mother, and spoiled my own life."

"Killed your mother?"

"Yes; in order to raise the £300 that vile harpy demanded as hush money, I had

to pawn a ring Roberta had given me two days before. While I was away about it my mother must have picked up a letter, which I suppose I had dropped. When I came in she looked nervous and ill, but would not have the doctor sent for. She grew easier after a while, but expired that evening. I found the letter in her workbox. Dr. Stuart said she died of heart disease. I knew it was of a *broken* heart."

"You did not tell me that at the time."

"I could not trust myself to think of it. Possibly I over-rated Miss Gathorne's regard for me, but it cut me to the quick, to be so completely forgotten in one short week, and I have always supposed you gave her a perhaps highly coloured version of the mess I was in. I am very thankful you did not. It does not matter now, but for years my life was a burden. I felt as if I had murdered

my mother, and although, from what you say, I now think it possible Miss Gathorne might have refused me, yet from the first moment I saw her, she was the one woman in the world to me. Now, Pat, you may believe me when I say I forgive you."

He rings.

Some one enters, and after laying his tear-wet face once more on mine, I hear my husband helped away.

Oh, if I could but move, or go mad!

With my heart full of those two men, it is borne in on me that even had I the chance of life, it might be best to die.

To die! I suffocate by anticipation. How shall I feel, O pitiful God! when the lumps of clay and little gravel-stones come tumbling down on my coffin.

The door again opens.

Steps advance softly.

Mercy ! mercy ! is it already time to be buried ? have they come to carry me to my grave ?

Bearded lips are pressed to my brow.

“My own ! my own,” breathes Horace, with his face close to mine. “Thank God, that in heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Wait for me there, beloved. One day it will be sweet to shut my eyes in death, and go to you.”

With a heavy sigh he takes one of the red roses from my breast, kisses my forehead, and is gone.

“Oh ! that all were over,” I pray dumbly in my despair. “Jesus, Saviour of the lost, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.”

* * * * *

I awake, as cold as ice, but so drowsy I can scarcely keep from falling asleep again,

feeling, I imagine, as people perishing in a snow-drift do.

It is broad day-light.

There is a sickly-sweet odour of faded flowers.

I lift my eyes.

On the opposite wall is a mirror with the frame swathed in white calico, in it I see reflected a white bed on which lies stretched a figure in white, crowned with wilted white roses, a cluster of red ones on its breast, the hands crossed, and a diamond on one of the fingers, flashing blue, green, rosy, in a narrow streak of sunshine.

At the foot of the bed sit two sturdy peasant-women, nodding and snoring with might and main.

A rat is scraping in some direction; it comes nearer, pattering across the carpetless floor, jumps squealing on the bed, and thence

takes a flying leap into the lap of one of the women, on its way back to the ground.

She starts awake, glares at me, and yells, which rouses her companion. The two fly from the room, shrieking like escaped lunatics.

I begin to comprehend the "situation," but make no attempt to move.

For the moment my body is forgotten in a blissful sense of resting in the love and keeping of the Almighty God who has delivered me from the jaws of death.

Many persons come hurrying in, with a scared look of expectancy on their faces, and without delay put me through a course of warming-pans, brandy, hot coffee, and other revivifiers.

I learn that the two soporific peasants were the appointed night-watchers, to scare away rats from my body.

“Ach, my lady,” says the stolid landlord, “If your coffin had been sent home last night, as it ought to have been, we should have screwed you down securely; but a corpse lying exposed on the bed, Hein! the rats would like nothing better. Soh!”

The first words I utter are, “How is my husband? Does he know? Is he worse?”

“Nein, no worse in body, but much distressed in mind for the loss of you. He eats not, and weeps, that is how it goes. An Englishman from Australia was here and did all he could for him, but was compelled to travel to Hamburg at daybreak, with the nine emigrants he came for. Herr Beatoun had known him formerly, he sent Andreas Hoffman’s son for another physician, as Dr. Möltke has broken his leg. Soh. He also gave orders about your ladyship’s burial. Is it your pleasure that the Herr your noble

husband shall now be told you are alive ? ”

“ Yes ! no ! wait a moment till I consider.”

Oh, my poor dear Pat, to think of you sick and solitary, shedding tears I can appreciate the double, treble bitterness of. How can I trust these crass boors to tell you such startling news, even if you understood enough of their patois to make it out ?

The “ fix ” is frightful, for Lizbet says he has not tasted meat or drink since yesterday-noon, while I am so weak the slightest exertion might make me faint, and words cannot express how I shudder at the idea of that.

“ Himmel, if only the emigration-agent were here ! ” repeats the landlord, seeing my indecision.

“ Thank heaven he is not ! ” flashes up from my innermost heart. Yet, ah me ! how that

same heart is even now going out after him, how vividly the old pain, for the loss of him, comes back like yesterday !

For years past, have I ever gazed up at the stars without thinking of him as a glorified saint? Didn't I mourn him in black velvet and silver filigree ornaments? Have I ever worn those ornaments since? Are they not in my wardrobe at home, sacredly embalmed in otto-scented pink cotton wool, in a little box that has "In Memoriam" written on the lid? When he laid his lips on my face last night, did not it shoot through me a joy that felt keen like pain? When he took the rose from my breast, to keep in memory of his dead love, did not my very soul seem to leap after it?

"Yes," I say to the landlord, "I fear you or Lizbet must break the tidings to my husband, but *do* be cautious, coax him to swallow

some wine first, and put ever so many pillows at his back."

"Just so, gracious *frau*, what would you like me to say first?"

"Say? well, I really don't know; but go at once and come back directly to tell me how he is."

"*Sehr gut*, never fear, I will inform him in the best manner. *Soh*."

"Help me up," I cry to Lizbet, before he has been gone three minutes, "quick, give me my dressing-gown and slippers."

A sudden passion of loving remorse has seized me about Pat. What if the shock should kill him? What if the old rift between us should reopen; what if—as through a glass darkly—I foresee, the ground I have of late been securely standing on, slowly sundering from where he is."

"You'll finish yourself up to a certainty,

lady!" cries Lizbet, as I get to my feet all in a tremble. "The house-master is no doubt already informing the gracious Herr of your condition."

As fast as my exceeding feebleness permits, I hurry along the passage, my husband's door is ajar, I hear the landlord holding forth.

"Ach, Ach! In this world things happen. When I was a youngster there was a lady who"

"Pat, dear Pat!" I cry, rushing in, flinging myself at him and my arms round his neck, "I did not die, it was only a trance."

He instantly grasps the facts of the case, but in his weak state strong emotion is too much for him, and he sinks back as white as a sheet.


By-and-by, however, we are both more composed, and relish our dinner when it comes

up at twelve o'clock, though not able for much talking. Perhaps, however, like the parrot, we think all the more.

Pat's meditations, at any rate, seem to be pleasant, for he looks the picture of content, propped up in a half-sitting posture, with a two days' old beard, his eyes on my face, and my hand in his as I sit by the bed.

As weak as water, in a huge stuffed chair, with my head leant back and my eyes shut, I am trying to think out a problem, which may probably tell on all my future life.

“ Onward and onward ever,
The old thoughts lead to the new,
Waking and falling together
The false lights and the true ;
Truths once hidden show dimly,
And pass with a fitful gleam,
The marks of the soul's great battles
Flit past like a misty dream,
Winding and changing quickly,
Clashing at times in strife,
Yet their bitterness all soften'd,
By the spell of a new Spirit-life.”



Alas, yes ! With my hand in that of the husband I am sincerely fond of, and face to face with my inner self, I know why the old linen press, and stumpy table, and caricature of Queen Victoria, and even poor Pat's cadaverous unshorn visage, seem all of a sudden to have grown charming !

Beauty resides in the eye of the gazer, and it is because mine reflects a newly risen light from within that every object shows through a purple-golden haze.

I strive to scan the future, from a standpoint outside this glamorous glow ; but the indistinct forms it shapes itself into fill me with combined terror and ecstasy. Not many hours since I experienced a mighty salvation for which my soul magnified the Lord, but lounging here at ease in a comfortable chair, with my feet on a hassock and one hand in Pat's, my hidden things are being as sharply searched out as Ananias' and Sapphira's, and

good, bad, or indifferent, demand a thorough overhauling.

Firstly, to marry as I did was simply a sin, but after nearly eight years of chilling unreciprocity, I have, without deserving it, attained to at least the pitch of conjugal bliss, an eminent Scotch divine describes himself, in his diary, as having started from the altar with.

“Dismissing all anticipations of heaven upon earth, may I betake myself soberly and determinately to the duties of the married state.”

This was how I felt at breakfast yesterday. Why, oh, why did Horace come to clear away every doubt of his love, remand me once more into a belief that vivid happiness is possible on earth; and leave me this aching sense of want, that keeps gnawing me now, and will, I know, go on gnawing if I should live till ninety!

Dear me, I am sure, I have been quite

happy enough the last four months, proud of Pat's talents, fond of my children ; thinking sadly and sweetly of my *once* love as an angel up yonder, and refreshing myself now and then by a softly-regretful peep at the silver filigree earrings, &c. I could have thus jogged on peacefully till grey hairs and wrinkles ; and, mayhap, on the principle of virtue bringing its own reward, ended by doting upon my old man, but now—

I once saw a chemist vaporize a brilliant crimson flower into dull white. I loathe myself, but that is how I dread it will be with me ; the iridescence of what *might have been* will steal away all the colour my life possesses, and by-and-by I shall begin to detest Pat for the selfishness that induced him to let me marry him, and the deceit which misled the friend who should have been my husband.

A gentle snore interrupts my ruminations.

How good and helpless he looks, poor fellow, and how dreadful it was to have him weeping over me last night !

Gracious goodness ! how my heart bounds at the bare recollection of *Horace's* adieu, and the touch of his beard on my face (how strange he must look with a beard !) and to think that at this very moment, the rose I was trimmed with for the grave, is most likely lying next his heart !

"Pat, husband !" I cry suddenly, kicking away the hassock, and seizing him once more round the neck.

"Well, dear ; what's the row ?" he asks, opening his eyes and smiling ; "a mouse, eh ?"

"No, no, listen to me. I heard every word you and Horace Frazer said, although I

could not stir. Now let the past be the past, dear, and never mention it again."

His face flies scarlet, and then paler, if possible, than before.

"Of course," I go on, "I was such a horrid, fast young woman in those days, no rational man could care for me, but we don't get on so badly now, do we, dear?" My arms are still round him, and my eyes full of tears, as I end with a little sob.

"My dear, dear wife," is all his answer, but his looks speak reassuring volumes.

Trembling with weakness I sink into the big chair, thanking God for the instinct which made me take refuge *from* myself *with* my husband, as if fleeing to the horns of the altar.

Possibly he will by-and-by feel annoyed because I know all about everything. I do not think he ever would have spoken of Horace,

but my conscience says I have done right,
and, old Paley notwithstanding, I maintain
that it *is* occasionally good to follow im-
pulse.

CHAPTER VI.

SIC VITA.

*Schiff Hôtel, Baden-en-Suisse,**31st August, 1870.*

MY DEAR MRS. EDINGTON,—This does not pretend to be a letter, only a bulletin to say my husband stood the journey capitally, and is now enjoying (or undergoing) his first bath. The water is celebrated for curing rheumatism, but we thought it a curious coincidence to be ordered here, as Pat and I met accidentally in this very hotel eight years ago, although neither of us knew who the other was. My father died here, and is

buried in the little God's Acre; so altogether the quaint old place is interesting to us.

We travelled between Mayence and Bâsle with two of the loveliest young religieuses imaginable, removing from one convent to another in charge of a big-jowled, greasy-looking priest. The girls, whose complexions were lilies and roses, wore pure white merino and cambric. It is the garb of a special order—I forget which.

One of them has mistaken her vocation, I should say, for she made eyes at Pat till he nearly laughed in her face. The other, and the fat Father, studied their *Heures* conscientiously all the time.

We shall, D.V., remain here a fortnight, and then, hurra! for home, with my husband as well as ever, I hope.

Is it not happiness to trust ourselves and our dear ones entirely to Jesus' care! Jesus

who numbers the hairs of our heads, and reminds us sharply, when what *we* fancy right, seems broadening into wrong.

How can Pat and I ever thank you enough for all your kindness to our boys? Kiss them for us, and say it rejoices Papa and Mamma to know they are so good.

If my husband progresses at his present rate, we are going for a day, next week, to Thun, to lay in a stock of carved work, as presents; so tell Tom he shall have the desk he asked for, and Brooke the "bear" his savage little soul hankers after.

I shall write on Friday, although this has run up to a tolerably long letter, after all.

With our united love to your husband and self,

I am, dear friend,

Ever yours,

ROBERTA BEATOUN.

“No, love, it is too early for you and damp, besides—I can go quite well by myself. Here are some English newspapers to amuse you; the bagman-looking individual with the ‘mutton-chop’ whiskers, sent them, with his compliments.”

I stick to Pat like a leech—and ever since a physician we consulted in Mayence said that trances are caused by weak action of the heart, he is afraid to let me out of his sight—but I particularly wish to visit my father’s grave alone, and that is where I am going now.

As a matter of conscience, I always drive Horace from my thoughts, yet, on this soft grey morning, he refuses to quit, and as I walk towards the Runic Cross, upon the site of which he and I once stood together, I think of Uhland’s boatman, for through the rank grass, and past the brass tablets

and lilac trees, my former guardian steps invisibly, side by side with me.

I am not very strong, so I have brought a small camp-stool in order to sit down and meditate.

The cross is beautiful, eight feet high, and as purely white as the day it was erected.

The inscription is in sunk letters of gold,—

Sacred

TO THE MEMORY OF

HENRY GATHORNE, Esq., H.E.I.C.S.,

Who died at Nieder-Baden on the 19th of August, 1862.

AGED 48 YEARS.

“The Morning Cometh.”

Poor Papa! to think he was only ten years older than my husband is now!

To recall the last time I was here seems like looking back through the ages!

Such a dream human life is, when not a nightmare. Events occur, lights gleam, shadows fall, but their want of *whitherness* is perplexing. Why were papa and Mrs. Frazer brought together till they fell in love, and then parted just because an old woman dislocated her shoulder? Do things repeat themselves in Providence, or why were Horace and I also brought together, only to be separated because another old woman broke her arm?

Why have I for years past been allowed to find a heaven-endearing sort of consolation in thinking of him as not lost but gone before, only to find that the train of thought, which did me good, it has all at once become *sin* for me to cherish!

The sun bursts through the clouds, and seems to cast a halo round these words on the cross,—“The Morning Cometh.”

Carried away, for the moment, by the wish

that fathers the thought, I half turn round, almost expecting to see Horace, and then, with a little smile at my own folly, rise to go.


“The Morning Cometh.” When my young guardian caused that text to be engraved there, how little did he anticipate the long dreary night that was coming to both of us !

But, thank God, the morning will dawn at length, glorious with the light that never shone on sea or shore.

I embrace the cross, take my camp-stool, and hurry back to my husband, who is in the verandah looking out for me, with half-a-dozen newspapers scattered at his feet.

His face beams as I approach.

“Now, dear,” I say, throwing off my hat, and taking a seat beside him, “you shall tell me the gist of the home-news, while I



finish your smoking-cap. Stay ! let me see how it becomes you. Do you know you never looked so handsome in all your days ? ”

CHAPTER VII.

“GOOD TIMES.”

“O ! lieb so lang, du lieben kannst !
 O ! lieb so lang, du lieben magst,
 Die Stunde kommt, die Stunde kommt,
 Wo du am Grabe stehst und klagst.

“Now, don’t forget, ten minutes to three.”

“Thy servant heareth. I shall be to a second.”

For time is money to Pat whom I am to meet at the Parliament-house, to go with him to look at a small carriage and pair of ponies the dear fellow is making me a present of.

I do not think he has ever been quite so

strong since that rheumatic fever in Germany last summer, but he declares himself quite well, which indeed he had need be, for business flows in faster and faster.

People remark how cheerful and sociable he has become, and it is a joke among his intimates, that his illness cleared off his superfluous bile, and filled him with the milk of human kindness.

“Somebody’s” conscience whips her up now and then, regarding his former grimness, but I am very happy now, and so fond of my children as to be an astonishment to myself. Even yet, I do not believe I could revel in the society of small humans of the kitten size, but Tom is in Latin, and Brooke reads first-rate.

Perhaps it is the bright April weather that makes me so light-hearted to-day, my usual state of mind being one of perfect content,

unfretted by certain “hankerings” after the impossible, which used to keep up *moral* “*raws*” in me.

Still, as the chief captain said to Paul, not without a great price obtained I this freedom, for many was the day and night, when I battled in agony, against recollections as sweet as caresses; dear old memories that insisted on staying with me, living in me; warm dreams glowing with the radiance of the life that “might have been.”

“But,” said I to myself, “Roberta Beatoun, you are in the condition to which it has pleased God to call you. Do your duty in it, and happiness will come. Ask heaven’s help, and you will get it; but do not expect victory if you sit howling with your hands crossed.”

Two o’clock strikes. I start up in a hurry. Meditating, over my lace-work, I have forgot-

ten the flight of time, and now rush away to get ready for my engagement with Pat, whom it would grieve me to keep waiting even five minutes.

Flurried at being so late, I toss and turn over several articles in my wardrobe, searching for a particular scarf, to suit my new pink, spring bonnet.

“Oh, bother! where has it got to? Every thing I don’t want comes to hand.”

I start as if a wasp had stung me.

In my rummaging I have upset a little box, and some silver filigree ornaments fall out. I bite my lip fiercely.

“Roberta,” whispers my inner voice, “now is the time to pray for aid.”

I dart up a voiceless ejaculation, wrap the box and its contents in a handkerchief, and jumping on a chair thrust it to the very back of the upper shelf.

Presently I am on my way to the Parliament-house, so bright after my little victory and in my new bonnet, that old Mr. Edington, whom I happen to meet and with whom I am rather a favourite, exclaims,—

“ It makes me cheerful to see you, Mrs. Beatoun. You look like Flora herself. My friend Beatoun is a happy man.”

* * * * *

“ Yes, they are beauties,” I say to Pat, as we stand in judgment at the stables, while the ponies are trotted out for our inspection. “ They are all beauties, but the greys are *perfect pets*; and, as for the carriage, it is the prettiest little thing I ever saw in my life.”

“ Well, dear, I’m very glad you like them.”

“ I should just think I do; and if those hostlers were not looking at us, I should

embrace you on the spot. Remember it is a bargain. I am to call for you at the Court every fine day, and drive you out before dinner; it will do you worlds of good."

"All right."

And we do it.

It is such pleasure, to be waiting in my dainty equipage and pretty hat for Pat, when he emerges from the regions of musty fusty law, and to carry him off four or five miles in the fresh country air.

"Flirting with your wife again, Beatoun," said a brother advócate, out for a *constitutional*, as we pulled up yesterday to say, "How do you do?"

"Well, old fellow," remarked another legal friend, stepping out briskly, a mile or so farther on, "that's what *I* call *otium cum dignitate*. Sit at ease with your arms crossed, and let 'madame' do the steering."

I think my husband would grudge missing even one of our drives as much as I should, yet he is busier than ever; but I suppose where there is a will to find time for things, there is a way.

And to remember our first dreary evening at home after being married, when, with a solitary “case” in hand, he could not spare five minutes to sit with his bride!

When such contrasts strike me, I sometimes cannot help beginning to cry, and though he says, “You little goose,” I think he understands. We are looking forward to such a delightful continental tour this summer, and shall take Tom with us.

The court does not rise till the 18th of July, but we start next day for Italy, *viâ* London.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLANK OF GLOOM.

“ Good-bye !
While you clasp, I must be gone.
For all your weeping,
I must die.

“ Good-bye !
We *one*, must part in two !
Verily death is this.
I must die ! ” C. ROSSETTI.

I KEEP the newspaper fast in my hand, and now and again read the intimation, in a dazed sort of way.

“ On the 7th July, at 48, Darnaway Street, of diphtheria, after two days' illness, Patrick Beatoun Esq., advocate, aged 39.”

I refuse to quit the room where his body lies, and sit all day long gazing at him, with my hand on his forehead. They will not allow me to remain through the night, but I am back at my post, before any body is stirring in the morning. The hours seem to move over my head with a muffled thud, like distant mill-wheels.

Mrs. Edington has kindly come to stay, and see after the children and servants.

“If we cannot succeed in arousing her,” I hear Dr. Stuart say, “she will either have another cataleptic seizure or lose her reason.”

They bring my boys to me, having told them to ask “Where dear papa is?” but I just stare, stroke their heads, and say, “Poor things!” Nothing interests me except keeping watch beside my husband, who would taste nothing except from my hand, and spent his last breath blessing me.

They bid me eat. I cannot, but swallow some tea to please them, and hurry back to my *dead*.

Mrs. Edington asks about mourning. I shake my head.

“My dear love,” she says, “besides your own, there is the children’s to be ordered, and the servants’!”

I give her *carte-blanche*, if only she will leave Pat and me by ourselves.

“My dear madam,” pleads Dr. Stuart, “you are simply committing suicide, and you still have your children to live for.”

My only reply is to turn to Pat, and lay my hand again on his brow.

Thus three days pass.

To-day the coffin is to be screwed down, as the funeral takes place to-morrow.

I return to my silent vigil, this sweet July morning before the sun is up, when

the grey-blue sky is still clear, and the only sound is the twittering of some swallows at the upper corner of the window.

I walk straight to the bed and kiss him, kiss him, kiss him, then sit down in my former place, and stretch out my hand to lay it on his brow.

“ Ah, me ! ah, me ! how he has altered since yesterday ! ”

He seems some other man, with that terrible blue-purple under his skin, and the dull shineless look in his black hair.

I shudder ; then throw my arm across him, and lay my lips on his closer, still closer, the more I cannot help shuddering.

This involuntary repulsion, although it does not last a minute, makes me hate myself, as if he knew it and felt hurt. I do not think of him as upborne on the slumberous pinions of angels to a world of bliss, but

as my own precious husband. So the more broadening daylight reveals death's awful tokens, the nearer I cling.

* * * * *

“So you see, my dear madam, every thing is left to you absolutely, except three thousand to each of your sons on attaining majority; you are also left sole executrix. . . . The will seems to have been made just before Mr. Beatoun went abroad last summer. . . . It is the greatest mark of confidence in a wife that ever came under my notice.”

The funeral, which they tell me was one of the largest private ones ever seen in Edinburgh, is just over, and our dear old friend Mr. Edington, with three or four other intimates of poor Pat's, have returned to read his will.

Mrs. Edington, the two boys, and myself, are also present in the library.

Business over, the gentlemen have a glass of wine, shake hands, and go away looking sincerely sorry.

Mrs. Edington is weeping. I wish *I* could, but not a tear have I shed since my husband's death.

We go up to the drawing-room.

There is a large pier-glass opposite the door. In it I see my white face and widow's cap, and stare calmly at the figure, whereat the old lady's tears flow afresh.

Dr. Stuart arrives presently without any apparent object, except to say "good-morrow and good-bye."

Mrs. Edington sees him out. At the door I hear him say,—

"Yes, we must have more advice! Poor thing! hers is the most heart-rending case I ever met with! Shall I bring Simpson or McDuff?"

“That is for you to judge, doctor, but will it not startle her to see two medical men at once?”

“I wish to goodness it would, poor soul! Anything would be better than her present state. If her grief does not make an outward way for itself, I fear she will either be dead or fatuous before the week is ended. I shall call with Simpson, say, about eight this evening; cannot make sure of him sooner. If he is out of town I’ll come with McDuff; poor young creature! how uncommonly attached she must have been to her husband!”

The day has been remarkably fine.

When I peeped through the venetian blind, as they were carrying out Pat’s coffin, the bright sunshine on the hearse-plumes made me sick.

Ever since, I seem to be moving slowly

through space ; craving ! craving ! yearning. We have dinner at the usual hour, but Mrs. Edington takes my place, and helps the children ; I sit beside Brooke, with Tom opposite ; Pat's seat is empty.

It was a mistake of the servant to place it there, and now, when he stupidly lifts it back, the children and Mrs. Edington have to wipe their eyes, but mine remain quite dry.

When we return upstairs the afternoon sun makes the room very warm, so the windows are up and the venetian blinds down, filling the place with golden-green gloom.

Mrs. Edington seats me in a low chair, and takes her knitting beside me. After a few words we relapse into silence.

The soft west wind breathes in, sweet with the perfume of mignonette in pots on the sill.

A German brass band comes along the street, and stops to play in front of the house.

“My dear,” says Mrs. Edington, rising,
“I must ring to have those men sent away.”

“Hush! hark!” I ejaculate, holding up my hand,

“Vous qui pleurez,
Venez à ce Dieu, car Il console.”

The cornopean seems to wail the forgotten words through me.

I burst into tears! a *flood* of them, that appears as if it would sweep away the remains of my strength and life.

CHAPTER IX.

IN MEMORY OF.

“ Yet, if you should forget me for a while,
And afterward remember, do not grieve ;
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile ;
Than that you should remember and be sad.”

CLEAR, bright and cold, the perfection of
Christmas weather.

An exquisite garland of white camelias,
and a basket of snowy heaths are on the
table.

I am going to lay them on my husband's
grave, I, and our two boys, who are my

constant companions, and such manly little fellows for their age.

I can scarcely believe it is six months since my beloved was taken from me, though at times it feels like years since I looked into the luminous dark eyes, which latterly were to me as guiding stars, so well had I learned to read them.

I neither visit nor receive, except three or four tried friends like the Edingtons.

Mrs. Edington wanted me to dine quietly there last week, but I declined; and am mistaken if ever I care to go into society again.

Yet I do not believe any healthy man or woman's heart ever aches for six consecutive months with unbroken self-consuming anguish.

The tortured nerve relaxes, or life would go. How I yearn after dear Pat none but

myself knows, yet occasionally I get laughing at my witty little Brooke's "fun," and for a quarter of an hour forget all that has happened, then feel bitterly remorseful, but my gloom has been shone in upon, all the same.

"The cab has come, ma'am," Maxwell announces in his most pompous manner, and presently the boys appear, buttoned up in their new seal-skin great-coats.

We are going to the Dean Cemetery. Tom carries out the basket of flowers, I, the wreath. No hands but my own, not even the children's, must touch that. I made it last night, after they were gone to bed, and as I twined the pure white blossoms and dark glossy leaves, watered them with tears. I felt as if my husband saw me, and were gratified.

I often have the sensation of his presence,

and rather encourage it than otherwise. This is why I do not allow any of his things to be touched ; his hats, and ulster, still hang in the hall, his study is just as he left it, and, as for the professional brass plate on the door, it shall remain there till I rejoin him, where, if the pearly gates are inscribed at all, it is with " Holiness."

It is a curious fact, and shows how God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, that ever since that dark hour which made it lawful, at least, for me to think of Horace Frazer, I have had no inclination to do so.

If the old longing *had* returned I should repent in dust and ashes, but none the less would it be there.

I play "Holy, Holy, Holy," in the evening, on his harmonium, and my thoughts fly onward to the time when we shall all be together again, loving and loved.

At breakfast and tea I always use Mrs. Frazer's silver equipage which Horace gave me, craving unspeakably sometimes for the sight of my husband in his vacant place opposite, and the sound of a voice that is silent now.

"Come, dears, jump out," I say as the cab stops at the gate of the Dean Cemetery.

We carry our flowers silently up the broad walk, and deposit them in affectionate remembrance at the base of the Granite Cenotaph where our beloved rests in peace.

CHAPTER X.

TWO SWAINS.

“ Si vous n’avez rien à me dire,
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi ;
Pourquoi me faire ce sourire,
Qui tournerait la tête au roi ? ”

“ BUT I am no longer a young woman, even if I were not a widow with a son eleven years old. I am over thirty-one.”

“ Well, my dear, don’t you remember what Camilla Toulmin says ? ‘ A woman is only the age that she looks ; ’ and nobody would guess you at more than twenty-five, if so much.”

“ Madame would be *belle à faire peur* in

a robe of this silver grey," says the modiste, holding up the silk in tempting folds, "for so elegant and young a lady black is too matronly and sombre.

Mrs. Edington, who has come to assist me in choosing a dinner-dress, backs up the Frenchwoman's opinion.

I have never been at a party since my husband's death three years ago, but the Edingtons, who have some cousins from abroad and are giving a dinner on their behalf, insist I shall be present.

The dear old lady, who has been more than a mother to me, declares it quite ridiculous for a woman of my age to lead such a secluded life, and indeed was remarking so, for the fiftieth time, when the dress-maker entered.

"If you were sixty, my child, what more could you do than live solely for your children

and disfigure yourself with all that heavy crape in this warm weather."

As to living quietly, she is right there, but I do not celebrate a perpetual Feast of Sighs either.

In the first anguish of bereavement, I suppose most people fall into certain perfunctory unsociabilities, which gradually become grooves, not to be quitted without a sense of sacrilege. This was my case for some time, but then I began to consider that even human affection ought to be consecrating, and that to do one's every-day duties better for having loved and been loved, is more Christian than to make a Suttee of one's widowhood.

So although I have never had the slightest inclination for visiting, and neither intend marrying again, nor believe the expulsive force of any new affection could drive poor Pat's memory from my heart, I yet find it

very pleasant to be able to think of Horace Frazer without compunction, though it is twenty to one we shall never again set eyes on each other in this world.

“ Now, my dear,” again urges Mrs. Edington, “ you will take the silver-grey, won’t you ? do be persuaded ! ”

I stick to black, however, and Madame receives orders accordingly, declaring volubly she will make me look charming, but that with the silver-grey at 15s. 6d. a yard, I should appear truly ravishing.

Mrs. Edington and I say good-bye at the corner of the street, and a few minutes afterwards I am annoyed at meeting a nephew of hers, ten years my junior, who has of late taken to escorting me whenever he gets the chance.

Being possessed of a considerable landed property and decidedly handsome, I under-

stand he is greatly in vogue with husband-hunting young ladies, but to me is simply an infliction.

I feel a hundred and fifty at least, and could not lose my heart now-a-days, even if I tried; yet when I look back to the time when I was in love with Horace Frazer I know that, for me, a glory has fallen from the earth. I am the reverse of gloomy, but my gay song has deepened into a psalm which, if sometimes a "Te Deum," is not seldom a "Miserere."

On the present occasion, however, my inward music is, I fear, neither one nor the other, but out of tune and harsh; as young Edington paces by my side, looking more moonstruck than usual, and so outrageously complimentary that I quicken my walk almost to a run, for fear of being proposed to in the street.

“ Here you are at last, old lady ; ” is Tom’s salutation, when I reach home. “ We thought you were never coming. The prizes are fixed, and I am to have the first in my class ; isn’t it jolly ? ”

“ Yes, indeed ! I am so proud, darling ! ”

“ But, mother, Brooke and I want you to do something for us—I know you will—you are such a brick. Come ! promise ! ”

“ I can’t till I know what it is. ”

“ Well ! Langton’s father is going to take him to America, to the Exhibition at Philadelphia, and we want you to take us. Langton is only down for the fifth prize. Say yes, little mother ! ”

“ My dear child, I have already hired Links Cottage for three months, principally on account of your cricketing. ”

“ Oh, we shall not be more than six weeks away, Langton says, so there’ll be lots of

time for cricket. Ah! I see your mouth trying not to smile, so I know you are going to take us. Hurra! it's all right, come along, Brookie."

"No, dear, it is not all right; I must think well over it, before taking such a step, and in any case Brooke is too young."

"Oh, mamma, don't you always say I am as manly as if I were twenty?"

"Well, well! I shall consider, that is all I can say. Why! it quite takes away my breath, to think of scampering over the world with such a pair of babies."

"Babies, that's good! Come away, Brooke, she's going to say yes. Give us a kiss, old lady, you are the best little 'mater' any of the fellows has."

They depart, and putting on my "considering cap," like Goody Two Shoes, I sit down to lunch. In point of fact, however,

taking the case *ad referendum*, as lawyers say, is in the present instance mere formality, for I know the issue beforehand.

I loved poor Pat sincerely, but he never was the "life of my life," and he trusted me so completely about our boys, that I always feel as if somehow bound through *them* to make up to *him* for the comparatively cool nature of my affection, to what I should have experienced had *he* been Horace Frazer.

A ring at the street-door !

Military heels tapping up the stairs, and enter Maxwell with the card of General Sir Wolferstan Giles, K.C.B.

My face flies scarlet, which is provoking, as the servant's eyes are open, and my maid tells me he is one of the greatest gossips in butlerdom.

Aydimé ! my prophetic soul divines the old warrior's errand, and of all discomforts,

one of the worst is saying "no" to an offer.

As a rule, you can foresee what is impending and spare the luckless man the humiliation of a refusal, therefore so far from considering rejected proposals matters to boast of, I think a delicately-minded woman would be ashamed of herself for allowing things to proceed the length.

Such being my sentiments, it is disquieting to guess that that proud old poker is waiting to pop the question under the full conviction that I shall jump at the promotion. I never intentionally gave him the slightest encouragement, but he is so puffed up in his own conceit that very probably he thinks I did.

Oh, why would my sons insist on spending the April holidays at Bridge-of-Allan, that happy hunting-ground of half-pay widows, and returned Indians with faulty

livers? Why did I happen to know Sir Wolferstan's niece, and thus get into the habit of walking home from the Spa with him and her every morning?

As these queries flit through my head I am slowly going upstairs, and can hear him pompously clear his throat for action. The idea of turning me into Lady Giles is absurd, but I am sorry for the old man. Perhaps like me he has missed his ideal life, and wants to try for it even at the eleventh hour.

My father's love-episode flashes into my memory, and with my hand on the door I say to myself, "Roberta, let the General down as softly as possible, affection in any shape is too sacred to sneer at."

Of course I make Sir Wolferstan's defeat as little mortifying as ever I can, but he takes it so humbly, that directly his back is turned I rush up to my room for a hearty cry, and

am in the full flow of that consolatory exercise when my maid comes to inform me that young Mr. Edington is below.

Having seen him so recently I take for granted he has called with some message from his aunt, and, after sponging my eyes with rosewater, I put on my crape bonnet to hide the traces of tears, and descend to the drawing-room.

To say my hair stands on end is a mild way of expressing my sensations, when the foolish lad informs me I am an angel of beauty and sweetness, and asks me to be his wife.

"My dear boy," I answer, "I appreciate the honour you do me; but just consider, my eldest son is eleven years old, only ten years younger than you."

"That's got nothing to do with it," he cries with tears in his blue eyes, "I don't

care what the little beggar's age is, you are the only woman I ever loved, or ever shall. You are so awfully jolly."

In spite of a very decided "no" he sticks to his point; and, sobbing and sighing like one of the mourners at Cock Robin's burial, declares solemnly that, if I won't have him, he will either blow his brains out, or go to the bad.

By-and-by, however, I manage to cheer him up a bit, and he retires with a watery smile on his juvenile countenance, saying,—

"Well, you know, I ain't the sort of fellow who easily gives in. I shall ask you again in a month or so, and, I say, don't bother about those two little animals. If you had a dozen of them, at thirty years old a-piece, it would make no difference to me."

For the first time a yearning after my vanished youth comes over me.

Ah! how brilliant the future seemed at

eighteen ! but the years as they came mocked me with water while I thirsted for wine.

Yet, looking back from my present standpoint, I clearly see that the great "crook in my lot," was of my own making. Instead of waiting patiently, and asking God's guidance when Horace's trouble arose, I rushed recklessly to the altar with one man, while my very soul clove to another.

The state of law, which makes false "Declarators of Marriage" possible is a disgrace to Scotland, but the threatened "Action" which took the bloom off two lives could not have done much harm if I had been less headstrong, and poor Horace more self-reliant.

The dismissal of my swains old and young has upset me a good deal, and I fervently wish I had wings like a dove to flee away and be at rest.

Perhaps this tremulous disquiet is the real reason why I consent so readily to the American trip, although I do not acknowledge it to myself.

The boys are wild with joy, and give me no peace till a letter is posted to Liverpool engaging our berths in the "Carolina," which sails next Wednesday.

Tom's school-examination comes off on Monday, and, as the Edingtons' party takes place the same day, there is nothing to detain us.

CHAPTER XI.

YET WHY SHOULDN'T HE ?

“ On dit, que tu vas te marier.
Je sais que j'en vais mourir ;
Ton amour ! c'est ma folie,
Hélas ! je n'en puis guérir.”

SIXTEEN at table. Not a ceremonious party, but a very pleasant one.

Mrs. Edington's cousins, in whose honour we are assembled, are a Mr. and Mrs. Baxter from Australia, where they have realized a large fortune by holding cattle runs, but they hail last from Philadelphia, having been there to see the Great Exhibition.

The said "Bazaar of Creation" is now the table-talk, and says Mr. Edington to me in his playful way,—

"If you had waited till the Court rises, I might perhaps have taken a run across the herring-pond myself to look after you and the boys."

"I wish it could have been so arranged, but we shall not be quite alone, Mr. and Mrs. Thomson are going by the same ship. We shall be together all the time."

"Well, I am glad of that, it isn't safe to let pretty young widows go unprotected among the Yankees."

In the course of the evening we have one or two Scotch ballads, after which Mr. and Mrs. Baxter give us some charming old-fashioned duetts on the piano, and very quaint it is to see a stout jolly couple of sixty or so put on their spectacles and, with good-

nature radiating from their faces, open the music-book, and set to work as if they thoroughly enjoyed it.

Mrs. Edington, who calls them the "turtle doves," says that for many years in the bush they had no society but their own, and used to play together every evening, to make the time pass.

They favour us with "The Downfall of Paris," and "Gaily the Troubadour," which were, I suppose, popular when they quitted England thirty-five years since.

It is the funniest thing to see their four podgy hands staccatoing over the keys, and their fourth-fingers curled up like little pigs' tails, *funny*, but not to be laughed at, for in truth I envy the old pair.

By-and-by our hostess introduces me to Mrs. Baxter, in order that she may give me information about Philadelphia, and as an

elderly virgin in white muslin and peach bows is singing "Douglas! Douglas! tender and true," we retire to the back drawing-room not to interrupt her performance.

As likely as not Horace is no longer in this world, and Australia is a "big place," but it is about it rather than the Great American Show that I would fain hear the old lady discourse.

There is no earthly reason why I should not openly interview her on the subject, yet I creep towards it, and in so doing am amazed to find my cheeks glowing like those of Miss in her teens, so much so that I am glad to cool them in my bouquet of Lilies of the Valley.

Nothing loth she expatiates upon Sydney society and bucolic existence in the regions beyond; but not finding these interesting a sense of disappointment is beginning to steal over me, when, à propos of a journey she and

her husband took last year to a different part of the country, she mentions what makes me prick my ears up.

“At Wagga-Wagga (one of the roughest places you ever saw, my dear), we encountered a most charming person, a Scotchman named Frazer, most gentlemanly man and so very good-looking. After he left we both recollected having met him two years before in Sydney. (It is really very curious how people come across each other in out-of-the-way places!) It was reported at that time that he was to be married to Judge Morris’s youngest daughter, but when we encountered him up the country it never struck me to ask if the affair had come off, in fact he was only part of a day at Wagga-Wagga, and is one of those dignified individuals you could not use much liberty with. Clara Morris was scarcely seventeen, and considered the city belle, yet

"I do not wonder at her choice. (I suppose they did make a match of it.) He had the name of being immensely rich, and, besides, was just the sort of man any girl would lose her heart to. I know I should if I had been forty years younger, in spite of his prematurely grey head, and a beard that looked for all the world like silver and gold threads combed through each other. It was beautiful."

"You don't know what part of Scotland he came from ?"

"I do not, but he must (from what we heard) have been greatly respected in his own Australian locality. The time we dined with him in Sydney he had just returned from Europe, where he had been collecting some hundreds of German and Swiss emigrants as labourers for that part of the colony where he resided."

Long ago, while in the North of France with my father, I remember going out for a stroll on one of those sweet golden-green mornings, when merely to see and breathe is perfect enjoyment. I sat down at the foot of a wayside "Calvary" to drink in the view, but had scarcely done so, when a dust-storm came sweeping across the country and in a moment had me in its vortex. Choking with gritty sand, in an atmosphere as cold as ice and as dark as night, I only saved my life by clinging to the Cross till the whirlwind passed, the sun shone out, and all was as before, save where rent trees, upturned fences, and scattered bricks marked the prints of the storm-wind's feet.

That is precisely how I feel at the close of Mrs. Baxter's friendly little chat.

Yet why should not Horace have married ?

Didn't he see me laid out for burial, and give orders for my coffin ?

Still, half a year was a terribly short interval between sighing "Farewell, Roberta, my first and only love," and marrying the belle of Sydney ! It would not have felt so cruelly wounding if she had been twenty-seven instead of seventeen.

I do not consider myself superstitious, but it is a curious fact that, whenever any special sorrow lowers around me, an invisible intelligence seems to arrive and inspire me with certain words that light up the gloom like stars.

Believing, as I did for years, that Horace was no more, I used to please myself by fancying it was his spirit acting as my guardian angel.

Sitting in a room full of merry people,

facing matter-of-fact Mrs. Baxter, I am now subtly conscious of this unseen presence, and these are the words breathed through me,—

“Vous qui pleurez,
Venez à ce Dieu car Il console.”

CHAPTER XII.

REMEMBERING, I FORGIVE.

And sometimes when I feel my strength
Most weak, and life most wearisome ;
I lift mine eyes up to the hills,
From whence my help shall come.

FOR flilpping mind and body, there's nothing
better than a voyage across the Atlantic in
fine summer weather.

I came on board the "Carolina" thoroughly
downhearted, saying to myself "All is vanity
and vexation of spirit ! The world is hollow !
My doll is stuffed with saw-dust !" Yet here
I am, as lively as possible.

Perhaps my exhilaration is simply the effect of unlimited ozone. Mayhap the clouds will return after this brief clear-shining, but meantime I thankfully accept the goods the gods provide, and enjoy myself accordingly.

We are a large party, as various in sort and condition as a "happy family" in a cage; but everybody tries to be sociable, and to Mr. and Mrs. Thomson and me it is great fun watching the different characters and guessing at their histories.

My boys are nearly frantic with delight, and every now and then frighten me out of my wits by climbing on the davits, a feat Brooke, the little harum-scarum, has taught his big brother.

The commissariat arrangements are those of a first-class hotel.

We spend most of our time on deck, read-

ing, working, and occasionally playing quoits for bottles of champagne.

What I enjoy more than anything is leaning over the bulwarks, watching the porpoises tumble head over tail in the greeny-white foam, and at night it is really magnificent to see thousands of fishes darting through the water, apparently carrying each its burning lamp, like marine fireflies.

This is our third day out; a cloudless, transparent day, that braces you up and puts you in such a benevolent frame of mind, as you pace to and fro on the deck, to the *thud thud* of the screw, that you feel as if every soul on board were a brother or sister.

At noon, when the captain "takes the sun," he informs us we are going fifteen knots an hour, and at that rate shall make

New York in little more than five days ; so we all begin congratulating each other, and add, by way of " rider," that our party is really so pleasant we shall be quite sorry when scattering-time arrives.

At dinner we are all as lively as sand-boys.

The captain has just said grace and stuck his fork into a splendid leg of South-Down mutton, when into the chair next him glides a dark-skinned, blue-eyed, handsome woman of seven or eight and twenty, dressed in brown silk, and the " correct thing" in trinkets. I stare, they stare, we *all* stare ; and raising our eye-brows, clutch surreptitiously for information at waiters skipping past our backs with plates of victuals.

A wide-awake retired colonel at length discovers that the new arrival has not been handed on board by Neptune, but is Irene

Stella, a celebrated tight-rope dancer, going to fulfil a run of professional engagements in the New World.

A queer little parchment-faced individual I have noticed before, turns out to be her father and guardian, but I speedily come to the conclusion that she could hold her own without assistance.

At first we ladies rather enjoy the chance of seeing how "tight-rope" behaves itself in private, and, I fear, use our eye-glasses too freely for perfect politeness.

But not a whit cares "Irene," who is none of your sensitive plants, as indeed, how should she be?

Perhaps experience tells her that in similar circumstances it is wasted labour to try to cultivate the female part of the company, so she devotes herself to the men, and makes play at them with her brilliant eyes, jewelled

hands, and magnificent fan, till I, for one, feel inclined to slap her.

There are several flirtatious middle-aged bachelors on board, and by the time we quit table, not only are they all leering at the audacious creature, but each whiskered individual in the saloon is grinning in the same direction.

Verily, men are not only unstable but utterly unaccountable.

Except for her turquoise-blue eyes, the saltatory female's face is almost ugly, and her conversation a mixture of vulgarity and flippancy. Yet here are sixteen "douce" well-bred husbands, fathers and bachelors, apparently magnetized thereby.

With the other ladies I sit apart, severely condemnatory; but even while contributing my quota of reprobation, I do, like Pharaoh's chief-butler, remember my faults this day, for

odious as the woman's conduct is, it forcibly reminds me of my own at Heatherton in old times.

From my present stand-point I intensely disapprove of her style, but as a lame superannuated war-horse remembers the battle when he hears a trumpet-blast, so do I know Irene Stella's sensations exactly.

Much she cares for our female taboo. Snapping her mental fingers at us, she glories in showing how she can make our male belongings "goosify" themselves under our very noses.

I wish I had less experience on the subject, and quite understand how awkward the ex-thief felt when (having in course of time's changes become a magistrate) a former "chum" was brought before his bar.

After attending an extempore meeting of ladies, where *nem. con.* it is voted our duty as

Christian women to give the "voltigeuse" the cold shoulder, and withdraw even the fringes of our tartan plaids from possible contact with the tassels of her "cloud," I go on deck, feeling pretty much like a toothless old wolf in sheep's clothing, and breathing a free pardon to the Morrisons and Mrs. Murray across the long interval of twelve years. The sunset is glorious.

Presently everybody is up watching the great purple-amber expanse, shimmering, stretching away—away to a boundless horizon of golden palaces, and glittering towers, and pearly gates and shiny mountains.

With the glow of it on my face as I lean on the bulwark, I think of the new Jerusalem, and almost fancy I can discern the white-robed inhabitants moving to and fro, hear the Master's welcome, "Enter, good and faithful

servant," hearken to the ever-new song of the ransomed, whose way to glory lay through earthly sorrows that almost broke their hearts.

Some notes of a guitar bring me sharply down from the "heavenlies."

It is Stella, tuning up for behoof of a bevy of gentlemen, who surround her as if she were a queen.

To give her her due, she neither plays nor sings badly.

If she were anybody else, her "Come to me when daylight sets" would be thrilling at this time and place.

The very ship palpitates in the still air, as if it felt the rhythm; stars glittering through the transparent amethyst sky, seem to listen.

You might hear a pin fall; the smoke of cigars mingles with the fresh breath of ocean,

as, in the waning light we speed swiftly on
our way.

“O come to me, when daylight sets,
Sweet, then come to me ;
When all's so calm, below ! above,
In heaven and o'er the sea.”

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOW-HAUNTED.

“ I could not, if I would, forget
The happy hour when first we met,
And when a glance from thy bright eye
First fill'd my heart with ecstasy.”

YESTERDAY we were all aroused to see an iceberg which hove in sight at six a.m., and looked like a huge double-headed mountain of ultra-marine crystal.

To day, at noon, a pair of young whales spouted about three miles away, their performance being rather better than that of the Fountains in Trafalgar Square.

We shall land, it is expected, the day after to-morrow, but that general suavity which rendered the beginning of our trip so agreeable, has turned to sulks and pique ever since Irene Stella made her appearance among us.

With the voyage so nearly over, the happy-go-lucky feeling that has hitherto held me up gives way to a sense of desolation, which I have been bravely keeping at bay, ever since my conversation with Mrs. Baxter, that evening at the Edingtons.

I pray and pray for tender memories of poor Pat, to fill my mind as they used to do in the early days of my widowhood, but where is the use? Horace and his youthful wife haunt me.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE LIFT.

“The mossy marbles rest
On lips that he hath prest
 In their bloom.
And the name he loved to hear
Has been carved this many a year
 On the tomb.”

Who that has travelled does not know what disembarkation and clearing the Custom-house mean, in the way of confusion, and impatient cooling of the heels?

We make acquaintance with New York and its excise at noon of such a sweltering day that the air seems to quiver as you look across the street.



The "Carolina's" passengers are taking flight in various directions : our little party drives to the St. Nicholas Hotel in Broadway, in one of the funereal black coaches which seem common.

I observe, as we move onward, my *bête noir's* name posted up here and there, in scarlet letters a foot long, as the "World-renowned Irene Stella" from Europe, who will perform to morrow-evening, &c.

"How strong that woman must be!" I remark viciously, "to exhibit so soon after such a voyage."

"Poor soul! perhaps she can't help herself," answers Mr. Thomson. "It is certainly a dreadful way for a female to earn a living, when every shilling she makes is at the risk of dashing her brains out."

"Yes, indeed," I say remorsefully; for, after all, what actual harm has the woman

done, beyond showing me a hideous "replica" of my former self? and when you are proud of being nice and clean, it is not agreeable to have the hole of the pit you were dug from thrust on your sight.

It is lucky Mr. Thomson wrote from Edinburgh to bespeak beds, every corner of the hotel being crowded, and the city like a beehive. Broadway is about half the width I expected, and, judging from glimpses as we drove along, New York strikes me as a combination of Liverpool, Paris, and London, not so grand as any, but like them all.

My sons are in such an ecstatic state of bewilderment that their utterances are entirely interjectional.

Indeed I go in extensively for "Ahs" and "Ohs" myself, when, from the spacious marble entrance-hall of the hotel, we step

into a dainty little apartment, seat ourselves on satin couches, and, under the auspices of a magnificent male individual in evening costume, are wafted to the third storey, where, after traversing an acre or so of blue velvet floor, we reach our rooms.

As the one o'clock table-d'hôte dinner comes off in ten minutes, we at once retire to "fix up," bidding each other go down when ready.

Something has gone wrong with the lock of my box, and, as I am working the key right and left, the gong sounds, making me nervous with haste.

"Mamma, are you ready?" cry my boys, tapping at the door.

"No, dears, just go yourselves, I shan't be long."

The key remains obstinate, I knock it against the chimney-piece, then blow into

the pipe, and insert it once more in the lock.

"Are you ready, my dear?" asks Mrs. Thomson, playing the devil's tattoo on the back of the door, "we are late."

"Please don't wait, I shall follow you."

"Well, then," cries Mr. Thomson, "you will find us at the second table from the door, on your left as you enter the saloon."

"All right, I shall join you presently."

I make another frantic effort and the lid starts open with a click.

In a desperate hurry I array myself in a rich plain black silk gown, with a cambric collar and cuffs, and selecting a beautiful scarlet geranium from a bouquet on the dressing-table, fasten it at my throat.

My hair is, as I always wear it, smoothly braided in front, and gathered into a large Greek coil behind.

After pinning in my flower, I linger just a second or two to look at myself, in a softly-sad, dreamy way, feeling as if somehow the Roberta Gathorne of other days had got inside me, and were gazing through Mrs. Beatoun's eyes at my reflection in the glass.

There she sees a mild-looking young woman with a beseeching expression of countenance which people say is most attractive, but whereas *I* am accustomed to a daily sight of this picture, it confuses my *old self's* perceptions, and makes her feel, as if like Rip Van Winkle, she had lost a link somewhere.

This curious sense of dual existence is I fancy not very infrequent, but generally too fleeting for distinct analysis.

In the present instance, at any rate, even before reaching that corner of the blue velvet

corridor, where the luxurious "elevator" stops for passengers, I am again Pat's widow, the mother of his children, yet seeming to have somehow floated a little away from my own identity among these psychological experiences.

The "lift" halts, I enter, seat myself on a maize satin sofa, opposite a large mirror with a view of the attendant's back framed in it.

He touches an ivory knob, we stop at floor number two, and in steps a tall, strong, handsome man, with a silky, golden-grey beard, and his hat and gloves on.

My heart gives a mad leap, like Ariel's in her cloven pine-tree.

He glances at me. Shall I ever forget that look?

It is that of a castaway in mid-ocean gazing his last at the sky.

He becomes pale to the lips.

Again the elevator stops. With a slight but courteous bow he gets out, and, evidently pressed for time, crosses the hall to the street.

"Come away, we thought you had got mislaid," smiles Mrs. Thomson, looking up from the fried fish she is busy with.

"Try this terrapin soup, it is first-rate," urges her husband.

"Hallo, little mother! have you seen a ghost?" cries my saucy youngest, who, with his sharp eyes and noticing ways, barely misses being an *enfant terrible*.

Seen a ghost? I cannot tell.

That bearded figure in the lift has stirred such a tumult in my soul, that, blinded one moment by excess of light and the next floundering in darkness, I tremble for my own sanity.

Something in the pose of the head and turn

of the shoulders could only belong to Horace, yet with the forehead hidden and the long beard, the likeness disappears, and yet again, instinct keeps crying, "Trust *me*, rather than reason or sight, *I* tell you it *is* he."

"Well, good people," says Mr. Thomson when our meal has reached the ice and pudding stage, "what do you say to a drive in Central Park? we may as well see some of the lions to-day, as we leave for Philadelphia at six a.m. on Monday, and I am told Beecher's church is so far away it will take us most of to-morrow."

His wife and my sons are delighted; I should infinitely prefer a quiet "think" in my own room, but cannot very well say so, and before long we are on our way to the "Bois" of New York.

Driving up Fifth Avenue, I observe a tall, bearded man, with a gaily-dressed lady on

his arm, turn into one of the right-hand streets.

He is too far off for identification with the individual about whom I am exercised, but the resemblance is strong enough for hope to hang by.

Then all at once she lets go her anchor and drops down dead, for alas, in the intense excitement of wondering, "Oh! is this my ain true love that I see there?" Judge Morris's pretty daughter has clean escaped my memory.

Now, the whole story is as plain as that two and two make four.

It *was* Horace I met in the elevator, the lady with whom he has just turned the corner of the street is his wife, the ex-belle of Sidney! —they have come to America to see the "World's Fair."

"Alas for love! if thou wert all,
And nought but thee on Earth!"

Horace believes he kissed my corpse four years ago, perhaps he occasionally has pathetic recollections of me, but his handsome wife is in evidence daily, hourly, and I fear it is not only in the Book of Proverbs that a living dog is better than a dead lion.

If my children and friends would not ask what was wrong, it would relieve me to burst into tears, instead of staring at Yankee mansions with electroplated bells and door handles !

Till I met Mrs. Baxter it had for years been my comfort to look forward to recognizing Horace in the great Beyond, but the prospect feels less ecstatic, than when I thought him single.

Well, well, marriage and all that sort of thing will of course be over and done with when we are angels, but I trust poor Pat and I at least, shall be glad to meet again, and,

wandering together up and down paradise,
rejoice that at length there comes—

“ Joy after sorrow, Calm after blast ;
Rest after weariness, Sweet rest at last.”

CHAPTER XV.

AT CHURCH.

“Lost our note of way,
Lost our chance to-day.”

A BRIGHT summer's day in New York is bright indeed.

The church bells are ringing as if they enjoyed doing it under such a gloriously blue sky, and all the world and his wife are in their gayest go-to-meeting raiment.

It is so warm I am very glad Mrs. Thomson persuaded me yesterday to invest in a couple of pretty white spotted muslin dresses, and a lavender crape bonnet, although I scarcely know myself in colours.

“Doesn’t she look ten years younger, James?” says the old lady, turning me round and appealing to her husband, who coolly views me through his spectacles.

“She would pass for her boys’ sister,” is his reply, “never for their mother.”

“Yes, indeed, mamma!” cries Tom. “You are far prettier than Langton’s sister, and she is just six years older than me.”

It is quite a long way to the renowned preacher’s church, and we arrive so much too late that the vast hall is crammed. Very curious it is to see that immense multitude of human eyes fixed upon a plain old gentleman unadorned with canonicals, and occupying a rostrum ablaze with choice flowers of every conceivable hue.

“I am afraid we have no chance of seats,” whispers Mr. Thomson audibly to his wife,

when by dint of patient wriggling we have at length secured standing room.

The great pulpit-orator is offering up prayer.

The concentrated attention, the intense "hush" of the immense audience is something grand.

As "Amen" is pronounced a slight movement takes place in the crowd.

Two beadles emerge and beckon us in different directions.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomson and Tom find places away to the right. Brooke and I are signalled to a bench, where we gladly sit down, just as the clergyman gives out what to *me* is the hymn of hymns, "Holy ! Holy ! Holy ! Lord God Almighty."

The mighty flood of sacred melody rises around. I close my eyes. My by-gone life passes before me, hardly a day of it but

what I should spend very differently, were it to be lived over again, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."

I open my eyes at the finish of the hymn.

In the next pew but one before me sits the man I met in the "lift."

My heart flutters! oh! how it flutters, but I do not faint.

Ever since that trance in Germany, anything like coma is so dreadful to me, that I believe I could die sooner than give way to it.

I literally do not hear a word of the discourse which rivets the attention of some thousands of listeners.

In a helpless kind of way, I feel drifting to a crisis of some sort—like a ship driving through fog towards a dim object, which may either prove land or rocks.

Thank goodness! Horace—if it be he—is

not accompanied by a lady, so perhaps after all the man in Fifth Avenue was another person; perhaps the belle of Sydney refused him, or is since dead.

My thoughts keep spinning, and whirling, and tossing, till my head is weary, but I cannot stop them.

At length the service is concluded.

The person I imagine to be Horace, rises to go. There is a magnificent sapphire ring on the third finger of his left hand.

He looks like Saul among the people, as he moves towards the door.

The expression of his face is dignified and sweet, yet there is a look of subdued sadness about it too.

The crush is fearful; for my child's sake I dare not encounter it, although Horace is passing so near, that I could almost touch him by pushing forward a little.

But, besides my boy's safety another reason keeps me from rising.

On our way here this morning the sight of Irene Stella's name, flaring on every wall and hoarding, made me feel somehow as if even yet shreds of the slough of my own "*fast*" days still stuck to my reformed character, and could only be rubbed off by conduct which, for the last few years, I should have voted *prudish*.

• The same idea possesses me now, and for fear of behaving forwardly I force myself to sit still and see Horace move away, without by word or sign testifying my presence.

Then, when the passage is clear, and with Brooke's hand in mine, I also rise to depart, it flashes on me that a *second* time I have had my fate in my hands, and made a muddle of it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DAY BREAKETH.

“I have loved, and I am wise,
I am proven, I arise.”

“And shall follow in deep duty,
Where the God-like Love will guide.”

MAN proposes, God disposes.

Mrs. Thomson met with a little accident to her false teeth last night, so instead of going by the early train to Philadelphia we must remain till the damage is repaired.

My boys and Mr. Thomson go after breakfast for an exploratory walk, while I bear the old lady company to the dentist's office.

I am so out of spirits and disinclined for travelling, that I feel the short delay of our journey quite a respite.

At Dr. Eckford's I remain in the waiting-room, while his patient retires to have her masticating apparatus mended.

The said waiting-room looks into a dull back yard, but amusement is provided in the shape of a grey marble centre-table, covered with native periodicals, and photographs of ballet-dancers and ex-presidents.

Instead, however, of examining them, I take myself to task for feeling at loggerheads with Providence regarding the administration of my affairs.

And then conscience begins insisting that the snares and griefs I complain of were mostly my own making, and that if when God sends us blessings, we do not stretch out a hand to take them, the fault is ours.

I could scarify myself for my want of *savoir faire* in church yesterday, but it cannot be helped now.

With a half sigh I take up this month's Scribner, and am getting quite interested in a story of Egglestone's, when the door opens, and a gentleman is shown in, who, as he gives his card to the servant, says,—

“Tell Dr. Eckford I am in no hurry, it is not professionally I wish to see him.”

My back is to the light.

He takes the nearest chair straight opposite the window, and lifting an illustrated paper from the table studies it, after the slightest possible glance across at the figure of which, thanks to the glare in his eyes, all he can discern is that it is a woman in white.

Feeling as I fancy we shall at the Resurrection, I recognize the person I saw in the lift and at church.

The lover of my youth was fair, and golden-curly ; this man is sun-tanned and grey, but as I gaze the old likeness shines through Time's work as the carving shows on an alabaster lamp when lighted.

My breath comes quick. Once more my fate is in my hands, for weal or woe.

"Lord, direct me !" is my mental prayer.

With Queen Esther's, "If I perish, I perish," in my throbbing heart, I rise.

It all passes in a few seconds.

His head is still bent over the journal.

"Horace," I cry, "don't you know me ? It was only a trance I had at Dorfen, I did not die."

* * * * *

Good gracious, have I killed him ?

In mortal dread that his ghastly paleness is that of death, I forget the proprieties, and throw my arms around him, not generally a

successful remedy for fainting, but perfectly efficacious in the present instance.

And then, poor fellow, he has to attend to me, for my weeping threatens to become hysterical.

* * * * *

He marry the belle of Sydney, or anywhere else? not very likely!

Do I believe *now* that there's a Providence shaping our ends, rough hew them as we will? Yes, truly.

Yet it was touch and go with us, for in two hours Horace would have taken the cars to New Orleans.

He has made a large fortune and left Australia for good, intending, after a year or two of wandering, to settle in London, but never see Edinburgh again.

He only called here to give Dr. Eckford a message from a brother he has in Sydney.

* * * * *

By-and-by my storm of tears subsides into a state of gentle “sob,” rather pleasant than otherwise with my companion’s arm round my waist, and my head on his shoulder.

To this tableau enter, as old play writers say, Mrs. Thomson and the dentist, whose existence we have quite forgotten, and the expression of whose countenances, if correctly rendered, would make a painter’s or even a photographer’s fame.

* * * * *

Excerpt from the *Lanark Herald* of Sept., 1876:—

“We learn that the fine old estate of Linton in this county has been purchased for 61,000*l.* by Mr. Frazer, recently returned from Australia,” &c., &c.

Extract from the *Edinburgh Telegraph* of date October, 1876:—

“ At 48, Darnaway Street, on the 30th inst., by the Rev. Roderick Menzies, D.D., Horace Frazer, Esq., of Linton, Lanarkshire, to Roberta Gathorne, widow of Patrick Beatoun, Esq., Advocate.—Australian papers please copy.”

THE END.

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